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DOCTRINAL KNOWLEDGE

THE FOUNDATION OF TRUE RELIGION.



IN the most extensive sense of the term, a doctrine is any thing that is taught. But in common language it is used to denote a *truth* taught in the Bible. In what is taught by man, there are false, as well as true, unimportant, as well as important doctrines. But in the word of God there are no false or unimportant doctrines; though some are to us much more important than others. The more important doctrines of the Bible—those in which we have a special interest, are the truths which it teaches respecting the character and government of God, the character and work of Christ, the duty and character of man, the immortality of the soul, and the condition both of the righteous and the wicked in another world.

The distinction between a doctrine and precept is this: A doctrine is a truth which the Bible proposes to our belief. A precept is something which requires our obedience. That God is good, is a doctrine which we ought to believe. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," &c. is a precept which we ought to obey.

By many, the doctrines of the Bible are thought to be of little consequence. Not a few, even of those who acknowledge the great importance of practical religion, frequently speak with lightness respecting these doctrines, and appear to consider any special efforts to ascertain what they are, or to explain and defend them, as little better than labor lost. But all of this description are in a great error. They have not duly considered the

connexion between doctrine and practice, and the influence which the one has upon the other. The plain matter of fact, that the practical religion, inculcated by the precepts of the Bible, can be successfully promoted no longer than its doctrines are understood and defended, seems never to have occurred to their minds. The object of this Tract is to show that,

Doctrinal knowledge is the foundation of true religion.

It is here asserted, not merely that doctrinal knowledge is of great importance in religion; that it enlightens, strengthens, and confirms the Christian in his duties and his hopes, but that it is the *foundation* of true religion,—that, without which the thing cannot exist, and all pretension to it is either delusion or hypocrisy. This will be sufficiently evident to every reader who candidly considers the following facts.

1. The duties of the Bible are founded upon its doctrines.

What God has required his creatures to do, he has not arbitrarily required, but required for good and sufficient reasons. These reasons are found in the doctrines which he has revealed. The duty of loving God is founded upon the doctrine that he is supremely good. If he was not a good Being, it could not be the duty of creatures to love him. And if he was not the best of all beings, it could not be their duty to love him supremely.

The duty of repentance is founded upon the doctrine of human depravity. If mankind are not sinners, they have nothing to repent of. And the question respecting the extent of their sinfulness or depravity, must obviously settle the question respecting the extent to which repentance is a duty.

The duty of faith in Christ depends upon the doctrine that he is the true Messiah. Unless he is as he claims to be the Son of God, unless he actually “made his soul an offering for sin,” and unless “he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him,” it cannot be the duty of perishing sinners to trust in him as their Saviour.

The duty of submission to the will of God under trials, depends upon the doctrine that God governs the world in righteousness. If there is any event which takes place

without his agency and in opposition to his wise and holy purposes, we cannot be under obligation to be reconciled to it. True submission to the will of God under trials, is nothing more or less than submission to these things, so far as the design and hand of God are in them.

The duty of keeping the Sabbath holy, depends upon the doctrine that the Sabbath is a divine institution. If God does not require mankind to set apart one day in seven to be devoted especially to the purposes of religion, and if the first day of the week is not now the particular day to be thus devoted to his service, we are not under obligation to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

It is a duty to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. He himself declared that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. The martyr Stephen died calling upon his name. All the primitive Christians were in the practice of offering prayers and singing praises to him. And all holy beings in heaven and on earth are represented by John as saying, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the *Lamb* forever." But this duty of worshipping Christ depends upon the doctrine that he is one with, and equal to the Father; for we are expressly forbidden to have or to worship more Gods than one.

It is generally agreed that prayer is a duty. But this cannot be a fact unless the doctrine of our dependence upon God is true. If there is any respect in which we are not dependent on God, in that respect it cannot be our duty to pray.

It is our duty to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love our enemies, to pray for them, and to do them all the good in our power. But all these duties are founded upon the doctrine of disinterested affection. If it is right, as some pretend, to make our own interest or pleasure the principal object of our regard, it cannot be duty to love others as ourselves. If, as is often asserted, mankind are incapable of exercising a disinterested affection, it cannot be their duty to love their enemies; for it is impossible that a known enemy should be embraced by any other than a disinterested affection.

It might be shown that *every* duty inculcated in the

Bible depends on some doctrine, and is one of its practical results. But every one is willing to allow that there can be no true religion where the *duties* of the Bible are not performed. If then these duties are founded upon the doctrines, it is a plain case that the doctrines lie at the foundation of all true religion. But it may be said, although the duties of the Bible are founded upon its doctrines, yet it is of little importance to know its doctrines, as all these duties may be performed, whether the doctrines be understood, or not. To this it is replied, the duties of the Bible *cannot all* be performed without a knowledge of its doctrines ; for

2. The performance of *some* of these duties necessarily *implies* a knowledge of the doctrines.

It is a duty to *believe* the doctrines of the Bible. It is a duty to *continue steadfast* in the belief of these doctrines. It is a duty to *contend earnestly* for the vindication of these doctrines. It is a duty to *discountenance* the efforts of all those who are attempting to propagate *false* doctrine. But we cannot believe any doctrine with which we are not acquainted. We cannot stand fast in the faith of the gospel unless we know what this faith is. We cannot "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," unless we know what are the doctrines which were committed to their trust. We cannot know who *false teachers* are, nor take one efficient step to counteract their poisonous leaven, unless we are able to distinguish the doctrines of the Lord from the commandments of men.

Admit then that true religion consists in performing the duties which the Bible inculcates. Here are duties, and very important ones too, which cannot be performed without doctrinal knowledge. To believe the truth, to continue in the truth, to vindicate the truth, to reject error, and to refuse to countenance those who would subvert the gospel, is a part of that practical religion which the Bible inculcates. Though there are many who do not consider that these duties are any part of true religion, or any thing which the scriptures require, yet it is a fact there are few points in Christian practice which they enjoin with more frequency or treat as subjects of greater importance. A quotation of one half of the pas

sages in which belief of the truth is required, and unbelief forbidden, in which promises are made to faith, and threatenings denounced against unbelief, in which individuals are exhorted "to stand fast in the faith," "to contend earnestly for the faith," "to give attendance to doctrine," "to take heed to doctrine," "to speak the things which become sound doctrine," would far exceed the limits proposed for this Tract. But this passing allusion to them must be sufficient to convince the candid reader that *many* of the duties of the gospel cannot be performed without a knowledge of its doctrines. He will perceive that any one, who will be obedient to all the commands of God, or in other words be a consistent and thorough practical christian, must understand the doctrines of the gospel. But it is not sufficient to say that *all* the duties of the Bible cannot be performed, without a knowledge of its doctrines. Though this is the truth, it is not the whole truth. It may be safely asserted that *none* of them *will* be performed without more or less of this knowledge ; for

3. The doctrines of the Bible present the *motives* by which all its precepts are enforced.

A mere precept or command is not that which produces obedience, or that which is instrumental of producing obedience. This only shows what *ought* to be done. Other considerations must be presented to *influence* an intelligent being to perform the duty enjoined. Now the doctrines of the Bible furnish the motives suited to influence creatures to obey. In view of these they see the reasonableness of God's commands and the goodness of his character. They see also their obligation to obey, and the consequences both of their obedience, and of their disobedience. Mankind would not be at all influenced by any of the commands of God, if they knew nothing of the doctrines by which his character and government, and their own character and condition are illustrated. Let the motives drawn from the doctrine of God's goodness and mercy, his truth and justice ; from the doctrine of his omniscience, omnipresence, and almighty power ; from the doctrine of the atonement by the death and sufferings of the Son of God ; and from the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and future

rewards and punishments be removed, and all the precepts, exhortations and commands of the Bible would at once be rendered a dead letter. As the doctrines of the Bible present the motives, and the only motives to obedience, which can operate upon the minds of intelligent creatures; to expect that they will obey its precepts without some knowledge of these doctrines, is to expect that they will act without a motive. And it must be obvious that in proportion as the doctrines of the Bible are obscured, or kept out of view, the motives to obedience must be diminished. Grant then the great importance of practical religion, and admit that this consists in obedience to the precepts of the Bible, still it remains an interesting fact, that without doctrinal knowledge there can be no practical religion. This will appear still more clearly, if it be considered

4. That divine truth is the means by which God sanctifies the hearts of men.

This is the means by which he at first renews their hearts, and afterwards carries on the work of sanctification. From the following words of James, it will be seen that the change by which the sinner is brought from a state of spiritual death to spiritual life, is wrought by the instrumentality of truth: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." Paul mentions the same thing as the means by which God had enabled him to effect the same change in the character of the Corinthians: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet ye have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." It is implied in what Peter said to those to whom he addressed his Epistles, that the heart is regenerated by the instrumentality of divine truth; for he speaks of them as "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."

From other passages it is equally plain that the good work begun in the heart at regeneration is *carried on* by means of truth. Our Saviour prays for his disciples in the following language: "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth."—"For their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth."

Now as truth is the means employed by the Holy Spirit in the conversion of sinners, and in their subsequent sanctification, how evidently does it appear that doctrinal knowledge is essential to the existence of true religion. It is a clear case that there can be no true religion without the Holy Spirit, nor without the means by which he chooses to perform his operations. Will it be said that there is truth enough in the precepts of the gospel, without its doctrines to be the means of the renewal, and sanctification of the heart by the Holy Spirit? To this it is replied, all the truth which is contained in the precepts of the gospel is the *doctrines* which these *imply*. Besides we have seen, that there must be *motives* to influence an intelligent being to obey a precept, and that the proper, and only motives to obedience to the precepts of the Bible, are found in the doctrines which it contains. Though the Spirit of God turns the hearts of sinners to him, it does not do this without motives. It is easy to see that when the Holy Spirit influences a sinner to love God, it must be in view of his holy character; that when he influences him to repent of sin, it must be in view of the real evil of sin; and that when he influences him to receive Christ, it must be in view of those traits of character which belong to Christ. It is, therefore, in the nature of things impossible that the sinner should be truly converted, even by the Spirit of God, without knowing something of those doctrines, by which the character of God, and the character of Christ, and the nature of sin, are brought into view. The truth, therefore, by which the Spirit of God converts sinners, and carries on the work of sanctification in their hearts, is the doctrines of the gospel. It is clearly implied in the following words of Paul to Timothy, that it was his doctrine which would save his hearers: "Take heed unto thyself and unto the *doctrine*; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." From the fact that *believing* is uniformly made a condition of salvation, it is evident that the doctrines of the gospel are the truth by which sinners are savingly converted; for whatever is proposed in the scriptures to our belief, is a doctrine. It could not with propriety be said, that mankind are prepared for heaven "through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief

of the truth ;” or that “ he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned,” if a knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible were not a necessary means in the conversion of the sinner by the Holy Spirit. But if doctrinal knowledge is essential to conversion, it must be essential to the existence of true religion ; for it is a plain matter of fact that there can be no true religion among men “ dead in trespasses and sins,” until they are quickened by the Spirit of God. There are those who make much of experimental religion, and doubtless sincerely believe in a change of heart by the influence of the Holy Spirit, who are often heard to speak lightly of doctrinal knowledge. But surely such persons do not understand themselves. All genuine religious experience is founded upon Christian doctrine. This is the sword of the Spirit,—the instrument by which he effects all his mighty conquests. There is not a single holy affection, produced in men by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the object of which is not presented by some doctrine of the Bible, and which does not agree in character with some doctrine of the Bible. All true love to God, to Christ, to man, has for its object something which the Bible *teaches*, and which is *believed* respecting these persons. Every exercise of true humility, and every exercise of true repentance, has for its object something which the Bible *teaches*, and which is *believed* respecting ourselves. Every degree of true Christian zeal is kindled up in view of something which the Bible *teaches*, and which is *believed* respecting Christ and his kingdom. Every exercise of true submission to the will of God arises in view of something which the Bible *teaches*, and which is *believed* respecting the government of God. There may be religious exercises, which arise not in view of any thing taught in the Bible, and which agree not in character with any holy object exhibited in the Bible ; but these exercises are not true religion. Men may imagine a character which they call God, and sincerely and ardently love this character ; but if it is not the character which the Bible ascribes to God, the love which is exercised in view of it can have nothing in it of the nature of true religion. They may believe in the existence of a certain character which they call Jesus Christ, and feel a very

deep interest in this character as their Saviour, and a very ardent affection for him on account of what they suppose he has done and will do for them, and still if the character which they have in view is essentially different from that which the scriptures ascribe to the Lord Jesus, their feelings towards it cannot be the religion of the gospel. Men may be greatly alarmed in view of their sins, and very sorry that they have committed them, but if the scriptural representation of the evil of sin be kept out of view, their repentance can be nothing but "the sorrow of the world which worketh death." They may be very zealous in the promotion of what they call religion, but unless this is something which is in accordance with the doctrines of the Bible, their "zeal is not according to knowledge," or entitled to the name of Christian zeal.

Other considerations might be urged to show that doctrinal knowledge is essential to the existence of true religion. But enough, it is apprehended, has been said to make this point plain. No one surely will entertain a doubt of this, who admits that the duties of the Bible are founded upon its doctrines; that the performance of *some* of these duties *implies* a knowledge of the doctrines; that its doctrines are the motives, by which all its duties are enforced; and that divine truth, by which we must understand the *doctrines* of the Bible, is the means by which the Holy Spirit renews and sanctifies the hearts of men. And with any one who is disposed to deny these plain facts, any further reasoning on the subject would be useless.

Here, reader, allow me to call your attention to a few things, which, as consequences of the foregoing truth, are worthy of your serious attention.

It must be a fact, if doctrinal knowledge is the foundation of true religion, that no one has any more *true* religion than he has doctrinal knowledge. If there can be no holy affection, but in view of some object which the doctrines of the Bible present to the mind, the truly religious feelings of every one must be limited by the doctrines with which he is acquainted. If no one can act without a motive, and every motive to obedience is found in the doctrines of the Bible, then the true obedience of every one must be limited by his knowledge of

these doctrines. If the truth is the means and the only means by which the Holy Spirit sanctifies the hearts of men, then they can be sanctified no further than they know the truth.

If doctrinal knowledge is the foundation of true religion, then the dissemination of this is the best means of *promoting* true religion among mankind. It is that without which no other means can be successful. This is that without which men do not know, and cannot know *how* to be truly pious; that which presents before them the strongest *inducements* to become truly pious; and that without which the Holy Spirit never makes them truly pious. Doctrinal knowledge is not, indeed, true religion. It is well known that many have a large share of the former, who are entirely destitute of the latter. But still as this is the means by which the Holy Spirit renews, and sanctifies the hearts of men, there is much more reason to hope that they will become truly religious, if they are acquainted with the doctrines of the Bible, than if they are ignorant of them. Parents, who instruct their children thoroughly in the doctrines of the Bible, have more reason than they could otherwise have, to hope that they will be subjects of grace. Ministers of the gospel, who preach the doctrines plainly and fully to their people, have more reason to expect that true religion will flourish among them, than those can have, who only temporize on this subject. And the Church, when she is the most active in spreading the light of truth through the world, has the fairest prospect of its conversion to God. The circulation of books that contain not genuine Christian doctrine, the labors of missionaries who "shun to declare the whole counsel of God," and religious excitements that are not produced and guided by the light of truth, will all prove useless instruments in the cause of true religion.

The dissemination of doctrinal knowledge is the best means of *counteracting the efforts of the enemies of true religion*. It is worthy of particular notice that the enemies of religion always level their artillery against the *doctrines* of the gospel. If they can succeed in refuting these, or bring them into contempt, or even in keeping them concealed from public view, they consider their

work as done. Now with what success can they be met without a thorough knowledge, and a full developement of the doctrines. This knowledge is obviously necessary to prevent people being "led away by the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive." It is equally necessary to qualify individuals to *refute*, expose, and counteract the errors with which the gospel is assailed.

Christians, in order to be *stable, consistent, useful, and happy*, must be thoroughly instructed in the doctrines of the Bible. Unless they are able to distinguish truth from falsehood in respect to the great subjects of revelation, they are liable to be "driven about by every wind of doctrine." Unless they know what the doctrines of the Bible are, they will often be at a loss with respect to its duties, and this will lead them to act at one time inconsistently with what they do at others. Their wavering opinions and inconsistency of conduct will diminish their influence and consequently their usefulness. As it is through the medium of the doctrines of the Bible, that all the sources of religious consolation are made accessible to creatures, the happiness of Christians must be diminished in proportion to their ignorance of these doctrines.

It is exceedingly inconsistent for any, who profess to be friendly to true religion and desirous of its promotion, to make light of doctrinal knowledge. Their conduct is just like that of a man who is zealously engaged in erecting the superstructure of a magnificent building, while he despises the care and effort necessary to lay a good foundation. It is just as easy to conceive of a building without a foundation, as it is to conceive of true religion without doctrinal knowledge. People might just as well hope to erect a building, without giving themselves the trouble of laying a foundation, as to live in the exercise and practice of true religion, without taking any pains to acquire doctrinal knowledge. They might as well hope that a building erected upon the loose sands of the river's brink, would stand firm and unshaken when the tempest and the flood beat violently against it, as to hope that a religion, which is not based upon the doctrines of the gospel, will stand in the day of trial. They might as well pretend that a deep and solid foundation endangers the superstructure, or diminishes its convenience and

beauty, ■ to pretend that a full exhibition of the doctrines of the Bible is unfavorable to experimental and practical religion.

THE GOSPEL THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION.

WHAT shall the dying sinner do,
That seeks relief for all his wo ?
Where shall the guilty conscience find
Ease for the torment of the mind ?

How shall we get our crimes forgiven,
Or form our natures fit for heaven ?
Can souls all o'er defiled with sin
Make their own powers and passions clean ?

In vain we search, in vain we try,
Till Jesus brings his gospel nigh ;
'Tis there that power and glory dwell,
Which save rebellious souls from hell.

This is the pillar of our hope,
That bears our fainting spirits up ;
We read the grace, we trust the word,
And find salvation in the Lord.

Let men or angels dig the mines,
Where nature's golden treasure shines ;
Brought near the doctrine of the cross,
All nature's gold appears but dross.

Should vile blasphemers, with disdain,
Pronounce the truths of Jesus vain,
We'll meet the scandal and the shame,
And sing and triumph in his name.

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MANKIND UTTERLY DEPRAVED

BY THE

FALL OF ADAM.



IN the Mosaick account of man's formation, it is said that God created him in his own image, after his likeness. That this divine image or likeness impressed upon man, when he came from the forming hand of his Creator, consisted "in righteousness and true holiness," is evident from the scripture, which says, "God hath made man upright." Yet Adam did not retain his original rectitude, as appears from the succeeding clause of the same passage, "but they have sought out many inventions." Man disobeyed his Maker's prohibition. He ate the forbidden fruit. He rose in rebellion against that God who constituted him the public head and representative of his posterity, and suspended their character upon his.

That Adam's race are born into the world sinners, in consequence of his fall, is plainly taught in the oracles of God. There it is said expressly, "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners," or as it might have been rendered, were *constituted* sinners; and, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." In these passages, the fall or first transgression of Adam, and the consequent sinfulness of his posterity, are asserted with such plainness, that no real believer in revelation will ever doubt the truth of the facts. Sin, however, as well as holiness, is strictly personal, and cannot be transferred from one to another. By this I mean, that no sinful act of one person can ever become the sinful act of

another person. Although fallen Adam's posterity constituted sinners, by means of their connexion with him as their public head; yet *his* sin is not *their* sin. And they are sinners, not because they ate the forbidden fruit, but because they transgress the law, as it is said, "*all have sinned*;" which is the reason assigned why death has passed upon them all. This is doubtless the true construction; for God declares, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" and in connexion with this he teaches that no person shall bear the iniquity of another, but only his own; that no person shall be punished for the sin of another, but only for his own sin. Thus it appears, that in consequence of the first offence of the first man, all his descendants have become sinners.

The brief remarks that follow, are designed to show the *nature* and *degree* of that sinfulness or moral depravity, of which, as now stated, mankind have become the subjects.

"Sin," says an apostle, "is the transgression of the law." This law is that of pure, disinterested love, or charity, the charity which "seeketh not her own." The sinfulness of mankind, then, being the opposite of that benevolent love which the divine law requires, must consist primarily in selfishness. Each of them places his supreme affection on himself, or loves himself more than he loves all other beings in the universe, and makes his own interest his supreme object. On this object his whole heart is fixed. With a view to its attainment all his designs are formed. He may have a thousand other objects of desire; but they are all chosen and sought for the sake of this. This spirit of selfishness pervades the entire mass of mankind by nature. For God's word teaches that they are "lovers of their own selves," and that they "all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Such is human nature in its fallen state. Hence, they are just as sinful as they are selfish. But their selfishness is entire. They cease not to love and choose their own things with all their heart and strength. This renders all their moral actions wholly sinful. And that the native depravity of mankind is *total*, the scriptures furnish conclusive evidence. A portion of this evidence will now be exhibited.

1. The scriptures teach that mankind are the subjects of spiritual death. To the Ephesian converts the apostle writes, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." This passage, which evidently describes all men by nature, clearly proves their utter depravity. For to be dead to holiness, and dead in sin, is to be utterly depraved. If language can express total moral depravity, it is expressed by this language.

2. The scriptures teach that mankind are by nature the enemies of God. To natural men Christ said, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you." To persons of this class he also said, "Ye have both seen and hated both me and my Father." And he repeatedly declared that the world hated him. It is likewise said, that "the carnal mind," or natural heart, "is enmity against God." And it is certain that the hearts of all unrenewed men are essentially the same; for He who can neither lie nor be deceived, has said, "As in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man." It is, indeed, the uniform representation of scripture, that mankind are haters of God. And their ceaseless contentions with him, from the fall to the present hour, prove their enmity towards him. Yes, enmity reigns in their breasts against the most high God, against Him who is infinite in greatness and goodness, and who constantly makes before their eyes transcendent displays of that greatness and goodness; who crowns their lives with ceaseless mercies; and who offers them, without money or price, the richest blessings, procured at no less a price than the death of his own dear Son. And what, I ask, what can there be but sin in that heart which overflows with hatred of such a God.

3. The scriptures uniformly teach that nought but evil is thought, or done by any of mankind while unrenewed. At a period of very remote antiquity, man's moral charac-

ter is thus described by an unerring pen ; "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." There are many other passages of scripture, which convey the same affecting, humiliating truth, and which, beyond all controversy, are of universal application, or are intended to describe the whole class of natural men in all ages. Some of these passages are the following : "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live. The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." But is it true, that any goodness has a place in that heart which is *full of evil* ? And is it true, that any thing but evil is done by those whose hearts are *fully set* in them to do evil ? These passages, if understood according to their obvious import, express very forcibly the doctrine of the total sinfulness of mankind in every period of the world. The same doctrine is taught by the inspired Psalmist, where he says, "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God." And what was his decision ? "They are all gone aside ; they are all together become filthy ; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." That God here means all such as are born only of the flesh, in distinction from those who are born of the Spirit, and are his adopted and peculiar people, is unquestionable, because he immediately adds, "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord ?" Finally, the apostle Paul having, as he says, "before proved both Jews and Gentiles," that is, the whole human race, "that they are all under sin," proceeds to give a more minute description of their character, in language borrowed from the Jewish scriptures. His description is, "There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way ; they are together become unprofitable ; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre ; with their tongues they have used deceit ; the poison of asps is under their lips ; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness ; their feet are swift to shed blood ; destruction and

misery are in their ways ; and the way of peace have they not known ; there is no fear of God before their eyes." Such is the character of the offspring of fallen Adam, drawn by the unerring pen of inspiration. How deeply stained this character is ! how completely polluted ! how base and odious !

From the preceding remarks, it appears that mankind are altogether criminal in their depravity. It seems to be the opinion of not a few, that since mankind have become depraved by the fall of Adam, they are not criminal ; that the moral condition they are in, is a calamity for which they should be *pitied*, rather than blamed. Now, although it is true that they have become sinners in the way above stated ; yet it has been shown that their sins are their own. Their voluntary exercises constitute their depravity. And since they act voluntarily in sinning, they are guilty, and deserve punishment. And although they now attempt to clear themselves, and cast the blame upon the serpent, upon Adam, and even upon God himself ; yet at the day of judgment, every mouth will be stopped, and all be made to feel their desert of that eternal punishment, which will be inflicted on the finally impenitent.

This subject shows why God abhors and condemns all the doings of natural men. It is evident from his word, that he *does* abhor and condemn all their services, even those which they consider their best, in which they place the strongest confidence. He declares that his soul hateth their appointed religious festivals ; that their solemn assemblies are iniquity ; that the incense they offer is an abomination ; and that he will not hear their many prayers ; and he tells them at the same time to bring no more vain oblations. And this he does, because they are utterly depraved. The reader may ask, do not sinners, according to scripture, sometimes love God, and delight in approaching him, and perform various religious services which he requires ? and must all these be denounced, as displeasing to him ? It is true that sinners at times feel and act as here stated. It is true also, that God does hate all their feelings and actions. And it is no less true, that he has good reason for so doing. For whether sinners love God and sing his praise, as did the

carnal Israelites, because they imagine that he is on their side, or hate and reproach him, because they are convinced that he is against them; or whether they shout "Hosanna to the Son of David," because they believe that he means to promote their schemes of personal aggrandizement, or cry, "Away with him, crucify him," because they are made sensible that he is hostile to those schemes, and intends to disconcert and overthrow them; whether they love and extol, or hate and revile the glorious God, the spirit by which they are actuated is the same. It is for this reason that God condemns *all* the services of natural men, as well those which are by themselves and the world accounted good, as those which are accounted evil. To say that God can take complacency in the unrenewed, or in any of their doings, is to say that he can take complacency in sin, and as a mark of his delight in the characters of its perpetrators, can reward them with an immortal crown! And surely, it is not possible for him to do this, unless it is possible for him to fix an indelible stain on his own character.

This subject furnishes a satisfactory answer to the question, "What should the impenitent be directed to do?" And certain it is, that they should never be told to do what is offensive to God. It is no less certain, that all they do is sinful. Hence it is certain that they should never be directed to do any impenitent works. Shall sinners, then, be directed to do nothing? Shall they be forbidden to search the scriptures, or pray, or attend public worship, or pay attention to their morals, or perform any humane and charitable deeds? Shall they be told to neglect all or any of these things? By no means. For sinners, as well as saints, are under sacred obligations to adhere to the rules of morality, to "give alms of such things as they have," and to observe all the externals of religion. Accordingly, in the word of God, sinners, as well as saints, are uniformly required, and with great earnestness entreated to observe and do them. These directions and entreaties are interwoven with the addresses made to sinners by inspired patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and by Christ himself, their glorious Head. But although such directions and entreaties abound in those addresses; yet every one who reads his

Bible with attention, knows that neither the patriarchs, nor prophets, nor apostles, nor Christ ever allowed sinners any liberty to continue impenitent. The conclusion is unavoidable, that sinners are never directed as God in his word requires that they should be, unless they are told, not merely *what* things to do, but *how* to do them; nor unless they are told to do those things with a holy heart. To direct sinners to read the Bible with complacency in its precious truths, and with supreme love towards its divine Author; to pray in submission to the sovereign will of the great object of prayer, and in penitence for all their sins; to attend his instituted worship in a holy manner; and, in a word, to perform every duty with a broken, contrite, humble heart, and tell them plainly, that without such a heart, let them do what they will, they are only adding sin to sin; thus to direct and warn sinners on this momentous subject, is to deal faithfully with them, and faithfully with Him, at whose tribunal both they who teach, and they who are taught must shortly stand, and give up their last account.

In conclusion, I entreat all who may peruse these pages, to consider well the subject; a subject deeply interesting to all, and especially to you, who have always lived and are still living in rebellion against God, and on whom his wrath abides. Although you were indeed born sinners, by virtue of your connexion with fallen Adam; yet for his sin you will not have to answer. But for your own sins, which, in number and magnitude, exceed all human computation, and which no instructions, nor exhortations, nor admonitions, nor entreaties, have ever yet induced you to forsake, you are accountable; and for these, unless a speedy repentance prevent, you must suffer the penalty of God's holy law. Spend no time, then, in making objections to the ways of God, or in trying to excuse yourselves for prolonging the controversy with him. Your objections are groundless, and your excuses vain. They will only serve to enhance your guilt, and fit you for keener anguish in the world of despair. You are loudly called upon by every thing within and around you, instantly to repent, and do works meet for repentance. By the evil and destructive nature of sin; by the transcendent value of your never dying souls; by the infinite

goodness, mercy and justice of God ; by the ineffably bright and awful scenes which will open at his bar in the day of final decision ; and by the retributions of eternity, would I urge you no longer to contend with the most high God, no longer to withhold from him the submission that he demands, and that is his due, but instantly to give him your hearts and your service.

CORRUPT NATURE FROM ADAM.

BLESS'D with the joys of innocence,
Adam our Father stood,
'Till he debas'd his soul to sense,
And ate th' unlawful food.

Now we are born a sensual race,
To sinful joys inclin'd ;
Reason has lost its native place,
And flesh enslaves the mind.

While flesh and sense and passion reigns,
Sin is the sweetest good ;
We fancy music in our chains,
And so forget the load.

Great God, renew our ruin'd frame,
Our broken pow'rs restore ;
Inspire us with a heav'nly flame,
And flesh shall reign no more.

Eternal Spirit, write thy law
Upon our inward parts ;
And let the second Adam draw
His image on our hearts.

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THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION.



IN the sacred plan of gospel salvation, we find a radical article, which by divines has been called, *the Covenant of Redemption*. It is a divine covenant, which provides the redemption and salvation of lost man.

To illustrate this essential article of the Christian faith, several things must be ascertained.

I. *Who are the parties in this covenant?* God the Father and the Son are the parties in it. The Father says of the Son, in Psalm 89th, where this covenant, as such, is most clearly found ;—"I have made a covenant with my chosen." This chosen is called David ; and was spoken of as David, centuries after David was dead, in subsequent scriptures. He is thus called, because David was an eminent type of Christ. As is usual in such scriptures, the type is spoken of for the antitype. Things are here said of the type, which are true only of Christ. "Thy seed will I establish forever ; and build up thy throne to all generations." This is true only of Christ, as is the following ;—"His seed shall endure forever ; and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven." The kingdom of Christ only is thus established.

Of the two Persons prominent in this covenant, we read thus : "In the beginning was the Word ; and the Word was with God ; and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him." Christ here is *God* ; and yet was *with* God. He is thus truly divine ; and yet is distinguished from the Person of the Father.

Here is God's "Chosen," in the covenant ; his "Elect," "Precious." "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him forevermore ; and my covenant shall stand fast with

him." So fully evident it is, that the Chosen of God, with whom this covenant was made, is Jesus Christ. For what is repeatedly said of the transaction, applies ultimately to Christ alone. We thus have the parties in that most interesting transaction.

II. *When was that covenant made?* Paul repeatedly gives the information. To Titus he says, of his own Christian hope;—"In hope of eternal life, which God who cannot lie, promised before the world began:"—alluding to the promise of God the Father, made to Christ, in this covenant, in Psalm 89th; and to other exhibitions of it, where the Father engaged to Christ a seed to serve him, who shall be willing in the day of his power; and shall be saved. Paul repeatedly speaks of this covenant as being eternal. To the Ephesians;—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy." To the Thessalonians;—"We are bound to give thanks always for you—because God hath *from the beginning* chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." We are thus assured when this covenant was made. It was "*from the beginning*;" "*before the foundation of the world*;" "*before the world began*;" which phrases mean *from eternity*. The counsels of God must be eternal: as are his existence, and perfections. A contrary supposition is a virtual denial of God. To the omniscient God, all possible systems must have been clearly known from eternity. To the omnipotent Being, all must have been equally easy. And the Being infinitely good, must have chosen that which, all things considered, is the best. This combined view of the divine perfections, shows the eternal immutability of the counsels of the Most High, relative to this covenant.

III. *What was the condition of this covenant?* *What did Christ engage to do?* He engaged to become manifest in humanity; to become a Mediator between God and fallen man; and to redeem and save. The "record which God has given of his Son," shows, precisely, what the Son covenanted to do. For he did what he engaged to do: and he engaged to do precisely what he did ac-

comply. The predictions, types, and history of Christ then, inform us of the condition of this covenant. The thing is variously expressed as follows: "Christ, our passover, was sacrificed for us." "The blood of Jesus Christ—cleanseth us from all sin." "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable." "I have finished the work, which thou gavest me to do." "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again; this commandment have I received of my Father."

IV. *What did the Father, in this covenant, engage to do?* He promised Christ *a seed to serve him*; meaning the very persons, who will compose the vast assembly at the right hand of the Judge, at the last day. "A seed shall serve him." "Thy people (says the Father to the Son) shall be willing in the day of thy power." God here engages to Christ not only a seed; but, by implication, the Holy Spirit to regenerate them at Christ's word. Our blessed Lord recognizes this divine promise as follows:—"All that the Father giveth me, shall come unto me: and he that cometh unto me shall in no wise be cast out." "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hands. My Father that gave them me, is greater than all; and none can pluck them out of my Father's hands." All that is involved in the official glorification of Christ, as "Head over all things to the church;"—all that is implied in the origin, progress, and final glory of Christ's church, must be viewed as the *good, stipulated* in this covenant by the Father to the Son.

V. *We have many additional testimonies concerning this covenant, in the word of God.* The gospel, revealed in the Old and New Testaments, rests on this covenant. It is (in Christ) the grand pillar of man's salvation. Some of the divine testimonies concerning this covenant, have been noted. And a *volume* of sacred attestations to it, might here be added, to illustrate the promise of the seed to serve Christ; a few must suffice. Illustrating this covenant, in Psalm 89th, God says, "My mercy will I keep for him (Christ) forevermore; and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure forever; and his throne as the days of heaven."

If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments ; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments ; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes : nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him ; nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break ; nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." Solomon, with his eye upon this covenant, says, "The just man falleth seven times ; and riseth up again." God will chastise his erring children ; and will recover them. To Moses God says, (concerning this seed given to Christ,) "I will be gracious unto whom I will be gracious ; and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." Our blessed Lord says of them, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." "That of all that thou hast given me I should lose nothing." "I speak not of you all ; I know whom I have chosen." "Ye have not chosen me, (your choice was not first,) but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit ; and that your fruit should remain." Comment on such divine decisions, is needless ; and objection is impious ! We will gratefully *hear*, and *believe* ! We will rejoice, and adore ! Here rests "*the good hope through grace.*" Our heavenly teacher adds, "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me ; and I give unto them eternal life." To the Father, concerning himself, Jesus says, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." "I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world : thine they were ; and thou gavest them me."—"I pray for them. I pray not for the world ; but for them that thou hast given me." Again : "That the saying might be fulfilled ;—Of them that thou hast given me, I have lost none." Let these full assertions be remembered, in construing the following passage : "Those that thou gavest me, I have kept ; and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled." This may seem, at first view, as an admission that one who had been given to Christ, was lost. But Christ does not say, none of them is lost except the son of perdition. The text is elliptical ; and supplying the ellipsis reads thus :—none of them is lost : but the son of perdition is lost ; that the

scripture might be fulfilled. This sense, and this only, accords with other assertions of our Lord upon the same point.—“Of those that thou gavest me, have I lost none.” Scott upon the passage says, “Judas is not mentioned as an exception; but by way of opposition, or distinction.” “To sit on my right hand, (says the Saviour,) shall be given to them, for whom it is prepared of my Father.” To them, at the last day, he says, “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Such is the origin of their salvation. Of the false teachers of the last days, Christ says, “If it were possible, they would deceive the very elect.” “But for the elect’s sakes, whom he hath chosen, those days shall be shortened.” To the cavilling Jews, Christ said, “Ye believe not, because ye are not my sheep, as I said unto you.” Such are the uniform testimonies of Christ upon this subject. And the testimonies of the apostles are in perfect accordance with them. As Christ had said, of his unbelieving elect then among the gentiles, “Other sheep I have, who are not of this (the Jewish) fold; them also I must bring;” so the apostles (and their successors) were sent forth to gather them into the fold of Christ. Paul accordingly said, “I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” And we find this in his history fulfilled, as in the following: “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night, by a vision;—Be not afraid; but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I have much people in this city.” Or, many of my chosen people are now dead in sin, in this city, and by your means must be called in. Of Paul’s notable sermon at Antioch, the Holy Ghost testifies, “And as many as were ordained unto eternal life, believed.” Let the reader devoutly peruse the 8th and 9th chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, as containing a specimen of the apostolic testimonies to the covenant of redemption. In the Revelation is the same testimony. We are there twice assured, relative to the Roman beast, “They that dwell on the earth shall wonder; (in the other passage, “shall worship him,)” whose names were not written in the book of life *from the foundation of the world.*”

Thus, in the oracles of eternal truth, we have the covenant of redemption, which is the foundation of man's salvation.

Objections to the views which have been given, are often heard ;—and should be answered.

1. *Is not salvation freely tendered to all who hear the gospel?*

Answer. It is! “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” Christ “tasted death for every man.” And of the infidels of the last days, it is said; “denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” The divine economy in the plan of salvation is such, as fully accords with a *moral government*; with the agency and accountability of man; with the offer of salvation to *all men*; with the obligations of all to receive it without delay; and with leaving all who do not, without excuse. God commands all who hear, to embrace Christ. And nothing prevents, but a voluntary and most criminal opposition. The eternal counsels of God, relative to the salvation of his elect, are attended with no more difficulty, than are his counsels relative to the common concerns of life. Both are equally fixed from eternity. God is able thus to form a moral system; and to govern it as such. He assures man, he has done it. And man is as conscious of the fact, as he is of his own existence. The eternal divine counsels no more interfere with the moral agency and accountability of man; than with the divine freedom. The Most High himself is fulfilling only those counsels, which infinite Wisdom and Goodness from eternity decreed to be done! But surely God is free in fulfilling his eternal and immutable designs. Man is no less voluntary and accountable, than as though no divine counsels, relative to him, had existed. Man ought instantly to embrace Jesus Christ, and to give glory to God in the highest for the salvation which eternal Wisdom has provided! and not, like the cavilling and self-righteous, wish for a salvation not originating in the divine eternal counsels! A salvation without such an origin, is impossible; and can exist only in the wild imagination of the enemies of God. The usual blessings, temporal and eternal, which God confers on man, are obtained by appropriate

means, which demand man's attention and diligence. Salvation demands those, in the highest degree. And men who will not piously use them, exclude themselves from salvation. The sluggard who will not plough, may beg in harvest, and have nothing. God promised Paul, (Acts 27,) that all with him in the ship should come safe to land. This event then, was made as certain, as is the salvation of God's elect. But that ship's company had as much to do to gain the shore, as if the event had not been rendered certain. And when the shipmen were about to flee in their boat, Paul said to the centurion, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." The certainty of an event, is not designed to preclude the proper use of means.

2. *Why is it not sufficient to say, God elected his people on his own foreknowledge that they would become holy?*

Ans. God eternally knew that fallen man (dead in sin) would never become holy, unless by divine regenerating grace. The Bible assures us that Christ's seed were chosen before the foundation of the world, not because they of themselves *would* be holy; but "that they *should* be holy, and without blame before him in love." Christ says to them, (after they are renewed,) "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should *go and bring forth fruit.*" This seed of Christ, Paul asserts were *predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ*: and whom he predestinated, them he also called, or regenerated. God takes the stony heart away, and gives a heart of flesh, and says, "Not for your sakes do I this, be it known unto you!" "Not according to our works; but according to his own purpose and grace that was given us in Christ before the world began."

3. *Does not God assure us, that he is not a respecter of persons?*

Ans. God assures us that he is a sovereign dispenser of his own gifts. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" "I will have mercy on whom I will." God's not being a respecter of persons, has no relation to his bestowment of converting grace on whom he will, of men rejecting his salvation; and leaving whom he will of such, to perish. But it relates to His treatment of the regenerate. God never respects one

saint more than another, on account of any worldly distinctions. Peter had supposed God would respect Jewish saints above all others; and that he might not go even to a *saint* of another nation. But, on being convinced of his mistake, he exclaimed, "Of a truth, I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons! but in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." But Cornelius here was himself an instance of the divine sovereignty, in his being regenerated, while many of his Roman brethren were left to perish in sin. The argument in this objection has no relation to this subject.

4. *But is not this a discouraging doctrine?*

Ans. When understood, it is not; but is a most encouraging doctrine to people truly convinced of sin. It shows them that God can save such beings as they!—that he has done it; and will do it. Hence their case (guilty, and wretched as it is) is by no means desperate. The gospel invites and commands them to go immediately to Christ. If this is done, this doctrine will never injure them; but will ensure their salvation. So long as they refuse to do this, nothing but this doctrine affords the least hope in their case. And it is no injustice to one rebel, who has forfeited his life, and refuses pardon, that another rebel, of equal demerit, is made willing to receive pardon, and is happy! Without this doctrine, all would be utter despair; no ambassador of Christ would find any encouragement to preach; nor Christian to pray or labor for the salvation of man. The denial of this doctrine may please the unconvinced, the proud, the graceless; but it cuts off the hope of the children of God; and points the soul convinced of sin to the world of wo.

5. *But the thought will linger on the minds of many, if this doctrine is true, what encouragement have any to seek salvation, till they know they are of the seed given to Christ?*

Ans. What encouragement has any man to sow his fields, till he knows God has decreed him a harvest? What encouragement has a drowning man to seize the rope, which is kindly thrown to him, till he knows God has decreed the preservation of his life? Why did not Christ comply with the solicitation of the devil, to cast

himself from the pinnacle of the temple? If God had decreed his safety, could he be otherwise than safe? If not, could he be preserved? So Satan wished that Christ might reason; and so he induces millions to reason. But Christ refuted his base temptation. His true followers will do the same.

6. *This doctrine is deep: why is it not best to neglect it?*

Ans. The being of God, and his works are deep. The plan of man's salvation is deep. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Shall all these be neglected? The gospel is to be preached, and believed; not because man can comprehend it; but because God has revealed it. This is the Christian faith: the reverse is infidelity. The one is life: the other is death. This life and death God has set before us; and says, "Therefore choose life!"

7. *This doctrine has ever been displeasing to the mass of mankind.*

Ans. The law, and perfections of God, and even the gospel, when beheld in their true light, have ever been displeasing to the mass of mankind.—"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God." Must these be denied? Is the pleasure of sinful men, or the word of God, to be the rule of preaching? Paul says, "Not as pleasing men, but God that trieth our hearts." "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." The uncorrupted word is the means of man's salvation. "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." The commission to gospel ministers is, *Preach the preaching that I bid thee. Diminish not a word.* In Rev. xxii. 19, we learn that *to add, or to diminish*, is fatal. Paul says, "Not handling the word of God deceitfully." "We are not as many, who corrupt the word of God." "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." All such testimonies utterly condemn the denial or neglect of the covenant of redemption, inasmuch as this is an essential article in revealed religion. If no part of the counsel of God may be suppressed, surely such an article as this, may not be. Such

suppression would argue the highest presumption in man, as setting his wisdom above the wisdom of God.

Right views of the covenant of redemption are important, as this covenant stands connected with other doctrines of the gospel, with the duties and hopes of the Christian. The covenant of redemption stands immediately connected, in the scheme of gospel grace, with the Divinity of Christ. It is the next and adjoining link, in the plan of grace. (See Rom. viii. 29, 30.) This is decided by the whole exhibition given of this covenant. But if the covenant of redemption were not true, the Divinity of Christ would be of no avail for salvation to lost man.

If then, the denial of the Divinity of Christ justly excites alarm; why ought the denial of the covenant of redemption *less* to excite alarm? As a sentiment, it involves consequences no less fatal, than does the denial of the Divinity of Christ. The question, whether many souls are not probably saved, who are of the community of those who deny the covenant of redemption, can be no test of the correctness of their sentiments. In how great errors men may, in certain cases, be found, and yet be finally saved, belongs not to this subject to decide. If some will "*be saved so as by fire,*" who, upon the true foundation, intermix with their materials "*wood, hay, stubble,*" this proves not the goodness of such perishable materials for the building of the gospel temple.

The covenant of redemption lies at the foundation of the covenant of grace, as made with the believer. God says to lost men, who are "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labor for that which satisfieth not," (Isaiah lv.) "Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David," (Christ.) This alludes to Psalm lxxxix.; and is as if God had said, If you will hear, as I direct, I will make with you my covenant of grace; which is but my covenant of redemption with Christ carried into effect with his seed for their salvation. To deny the covenant of redemption then, is to deny the covenant of grace, which rests upon it. Destroy the foundation, and the superstructure falls. It is then "*preaching another gospel,*" than the true gospel of Christ.

A denial of this covenant is a denial of the following urgent Christian duty: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Make the evidence of your personal election sure to yourselves, by making the evidence sure to yourselves of your effectual calling, or regeneration. The only alternative of this duty is, to build upon our *own sandy foundation!*

Such denial cuts off the triumph of the Christian's faith. Such triumph is the following: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?—Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The faithful saint here rides in his triumphant chariot of salvation; which chariot is overturned by the denial of the covenant of redemption.

As this covenant holds an essential place in that system, called "*the faith once delivered to the saints*," it is, in no small degree, alarming, that the express, or virtual denial of it, is so prevalent, and so popular, in this age of innovation and infidelity! And the express command of Heaven is now direct in point;—"It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

The covenant of redemption, and this alone, gives to the salvation of the gospel an origin worthy of God, and safe for man. It was this, which enabled a prophet, when in darkness, to say of God, "He will bring me forth to the light; and I shall behold his righteousness." "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! When I fall, I shall rise again; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will

be a light unto me." Here is the foundation of such addresses as the following: "Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and seeth no light: let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." All the ground of such trust in the Lord, is taken away, if this covenant is taken away.

And such denial, it is believed, forms the character addressed in the following tremendous divine warning:—"Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks! Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled! lo, this shall ye have at my hands; ye shall lie down in sorrow!"

Ye children of God; having fled for refuge to the hope set before you; if you have made your calling and election sure to yourselves;—give glory to God in the highest, for this immutable foundation of your hope. Here is the rock, on which your anchor rests within the vail. With this, your feeble bark will stand firm against billows, tides, and tempests! So far as you find that you "*rejoice in hope of the glory of God*," so far you may also "rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Fellow mortals out of Christ; fly instantly to this great salvation. To this duty, God invites, and commands. And, till you obey, you can have no evidence that you will not be vessels of wrath fitted for destruction! God will get his full glory of you, either in your salvation, or your eternal perdition. His justice and sovereignty may well fill your souls with amazement, while rejecting his salvation. "To-day, then, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." This moment Christ knocks at the door of your hearts. Open the door to him at once; and "be ye reconciled to God." Take heed that ye be not led away with any scheme of religion, which rejects, or builds not on the covenant of redemption which ye have heard! This alone gives strong consolation to those who flee for refuge to the hope set before them.

SLANDEROUS REPORTS REFUTED.



“WE be slanderously reported, and some affirm that we say, Let us do evil that good may come.” Rom. iii. 8.

These words occur in the course of an argument, in which the apostle is defending the justice of God against an objection founded on the acknowledged fact, that the wickedness of men is, by an overruling providence, made subservient to the divine glory. He anticipates the objector as saying, “If our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God—if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie, unto his glory—why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And why not rather let us do evil, that good may come?” This sentiment, hostile as it evidently is to the law and government of the Supreme Being, the apostle tells us in a parenthesis, was imputed, and most unfairly and slanderously imputed, to him and his brethren. Some affirmed that they held such language, and that they conducted, and encouraged others to conduct, on such a principle: whereas he allows, if they did so, their condemnation would be just. It appears from this passage, that religion has always suffered much from the misrepresentations of its enemies, and from the consequent misapprehensions and prejudices of those who are seeking a knowledge of its truths and obligations. And perhaps there never was a period when such misrepresentations, mistakes and prejudices were more prevalent than at the present day. When I read and hear the accounts which many give, of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, I cease to wonder, that those who have not gained a more intimate acquaintance with them from the only authentic source, are most unfavorably impressed; and often tempted to desist from further

inquiry into a system so forbidding in its aspect. It must be acknowledged, that want of prudence and consistency in those who love, and endeavor to recommend, the doctrines of inspiration, contributes not a little to augment this evil ; and, therefore, that we are not to regard every erroneous "report" concerning these doctrines as being in the strictest sense of the word a "slandorous" one. I wish to keep this acknowledgment distinctly and steadily in view, in the following remarks : for I would not be understood to insinuate, that all who misrepresent the doctrines which we hold, do it *knowingly*, or with any *wrong intention* ; but simply to state—what I presume will be generally allowed—that these doctrines are very *variously* represented, and that *some* representations of them must therefore be *incorrect* ; and hence we may learn the importance of forming our opinions of them from personal, and careful, and candid examination ; and not from vague report, however plausible that report may be. I fear there are too few who search the scriptures for themselves, and too many who are contented with such information on religious subjects as they can gather in the course of their miscellaneous reading, and in the ordinary intercourse of society. Hence they are often prejudiced against the truth, in consequence of some misstatement of an important doctrine, or some unfair inference from a statement which was itself correct.

To take our *first* example from the subject referred to in the text,—It is probable that some very honest inquirers after truth were prejudiced against the cause of primitive Christianity, by those who represented the apostles as avowing and acting upon the principle, that men may be excusable and even commendable in doing that which is, in itself, evil, on account of the good which is made to result from it in the wise and holy providence of God. Now this report, so far from being true, was founded in a mere inference—and a very unjustifiable inference too—from the doctrine of salvation by sovereign grace through faith, which the apostles held and published. Because they gratefully acknowledged that God had taken *occasion* from the *abounding sins* of men, to illustrate the riches of his *superabounding grace*, they were accused of *apologizing* for the unbelief and

impentence which are thus overruled for good. But surely such an inference was altogether unfair. The *moral quality* of human conduct is one thing, and the *result* or *consequence* of it is another. It is written indeed, that "the wrath of man shall surely praise" God : but what then ? Is it on this account commendable ? No : for *it is written again*, "The wrath of man *worketh* not the righteousness of God." It may be overruled for a purpose diametrically opposite to its tendency : but its tendency remains the same ; and therefore its ill-desert is undiminished. Shall we then practise iniquity, that our unrighteousness may commend the righteousness of God ? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound ? God forbid ! We have no rule of life but his revealed law. If we transgress that law, we sin ; nor is our guilt removed by any use which his infinite wisdom and power may make of our transgressions.

2. The doctrine of "justification by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," is, in another point of view, made the subject of unfounded and injurious "report." We are sometimes represented as holding this doctrine in such a sense, as greatly to diminish the importance of human character, and the strength of moral obligation. Because we maintain that God justifies (or pardons) men *freely*—that is, in the exercise of his own, self-moved mercy, and on account of the propitiatory sacrifice of his Son,—some affirm that we say, He does it *arbitrarily*, and *without any regard to the character and conduct of those whom He pardons*. Because we deny that repentance and new obedience are the *meritorious ground* of our forgiveness, we are considered as denying that they have *any connexion* with it. This would indeed be to "make void the law through faith." But we repel the charge. We hold no such doctrine as is here imputed to us. We regard faith in a crucified Redeemer, not as a *substitute* for obedience, but as a *principle* of obedience. The faith in our adorable Saviour which we recommend, and which alone can entitle any to the benefit of his mediation, "worketh by love"—"purifieth the heart"—"overcometh the world."

Can we have no sufficient motive to evangelical obedience, without regarding it as the ground of our accept-

ance with God ? We think we can. Yea, we consider that humble and grateful sense of dependence and obligation, which accompanies a cordial reliance on the sacrifice and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ, a motive to obedience more ingenuous and more powerful than any which a mere regard to our own dignity and safety could supply : “ for the love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that He died for all, that they who live might live henceforth, not unto themselves, but to Him who died for them and rose again.”

That some do hold the truth in unrighteousness, we cannot deny. But is it fair to infer from this sorrowful fact, that the preachers of a free salvation encourage them to do so ? or that the doctrine of gratuitous forgiveness has an immoral tendency ? By no means. On the contrary, the argument, with which Paul opposed that legal spirit which some Galatians manifested by mingling Jewish ceremonies with the simpler duties of Christianity, is applicable, in all its force, to those who would *put any thing else with the merits of Christ*, as the *ground* of their acceptance with God. “ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ ; that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin ? God forbid ! For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ : nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Gal. ii. 16—20.)

But here it may be asked, “ If you really consider good works a constituent part of true religion, why would you enfeeble any motive which may induce us to perform them. Obedience to the moral law, you allow to be desirable and salutary ; nay, even indispensable : let us then have all possible encouragement to render it.” I answer, Amen, with all my heart. But let us proceed

understandingly. What is obedience to the moral law ? It is not only acting and speaking, but *feeling* also agreeably to divine requirement. There are two senses, in which works may be called good. They may be so called with reference merely to their effect on others ; or with reference also to the motive and intention, and consequently to the moral character of the performer. This latter class only, God will approve and reward. While therefore we would not enfeeble any right motive to duty, we must be careful not to suggest any of a different nature ; since, by so doing, we should encourage delusive expectations, and thus, at the same time, abate the force of those motives by which men should be actuated in their obedience to the revealed will of God.

Now we believe that the desire and hope of acquiring a title to divine favor, either wholly or in part, by our own doings, is a motive of obedience not only *different* from that which the gospel suggests, but altogether *opposed* to it. When some who attended on our Lord's ministry asked him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God ?" He answered, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom he hath sent." And said Paul, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." If therefore we attempt obedience to the divine law on any principle which implies a contradiction of these plain statements, we cannot be accepted. If, being ignorant of God's righteousness, we go about to establish our own righteousness, we shall not submit ourselves to the righteousness of Christ ; and, of course, shall not attain the *end* or spiritual fulfilment of the law.*

While then we esteem it "a faithful saying," that God saves us, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost ;—that, being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life :"—we "affirm it constantly," *for this very purpose*, "that they who have believed in God, may be careful to maintain good works ;"—works which, being performed from gospel motives, as well ■■

* Rom. x. 3, 4.

according to gospel precepts, will be "good and profitable unto men;" both to those who perform, and those who witness them.* We desire indeed to acknowledge with gratitude, "the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus: for by grace are we saved, through faith; and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." But though "*boasting*" is excluded by the law of faith, "*obedience*" is not; "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."† We have just as much evidence of our forgiveness, as we have of our sanctification, and no more. Let none therefore slanderously report the doctrine of justification by grace: for it is a "doctrine according to godliness."

3. Similar mistakes and misrepresentations are made on the subject of original sin, or the corruption of our moral nature considered as a consequence of our first parents' apostacy; and the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit, which is hence declared necessary to prepare us for the kingdom of heaven.

"The doctrine of Depravity," says one,‡ "teaches us that, having given us a nature entirely corrupt, incapable of good, and prone to all evil, God placed us in this world, with a command to do what he knows we cannot do; and then condemns us to eternal wo for doing that which he knows we cannot help doing."—"According to this doctrine, we come into life with a fixed character; we are then decidedly, entirely, and, for aught we can ever do, incurably wicked."—"If so, how can the days or years which may follow be termed a season of probation?"—"Our doom is decided at the outset, and cannot be the consequence of a trial which it precedes. In fact, to talk of trial here is idle and absurd. Especially when we recollect that it is also declared by the advocates for this doctrine, that nothing less than a special, irresistible agency of God can ever alter the character we bring with us into the world."—"And to hasten, retard, or even procure this divine interposition is alike impossible, let

* Titus iii. 5—8.

† Ephes. ii. 7—10.

‡ Discourse on Human Depravity, by Edmund Q. Sewall. Printed for the Am. Unitarian Association

us do what we may. It lies in the counsel of his own will, and God only knows how, when, or on whom the regenerating grace shall descend. If any one share the blessing, his change of character will be as much the sole act of God, as if he had been without sense or motion up to the very moment of its occurrence. In his own time, God will operate on the soul for its recovery. Till then, existence is a mere blank. We can lose nothing, since all was lost at the beginning ; we can gain nothing, because all we do prior to regeneration is done in vain : we are not made worse by the neglect of moral means, for it is impossible to be more than *totally* depraved ; we are not improved by the use of them, for that would detract from the sovereignty of divine grace, to which as the *sole* unaided cause, all change for the better is attributed."

Now this portrait of the connected doctrines, Depravity and Regeneration,—or rather, this *caricature* of them, presents some very disgusting and appalling features, it is true : but let us not be needlessly alarmed ; it is only a caricature : every feature is so distorted, that there remains scarcely a distant resemblance of the original from which the author professes to draw. Some affirm that we say such horrid things : but we do not say them, or any thing which necessarily implies them. We declare indeed, and we take the Bible for our voucher, that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We believe they have done this in the free exercise of their moral faculties ;—faculties given to render them capable of holy duties and enjoyments, but perverted by them to an opposite purpose. We contend that mankind do so early and so uniformly transgress the spiritual law of God, as to prove themselves originally destitute of that supreme love to God, and that impartial love to each other, which are "the fulfilling of the law ;" and consequently that, if left to themselves, they will continue to disobey it, and of course continue subject to the penalty of disobedience. We believe too, because the scriptures tell us so, that there is *some* connexion between the apostacy and corruption of our first parents, and the character of their descendants ; that "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners :"—not that we are answerable for the first

transgression, or that we are liable to condemnation for any thing but our own personal and voluntary offences ;—but that among the unhappy consequences of Adam's apostacy, we find the humbling and alarming fact, that all his descendants, as soon as they are capable of it, manifest the disposition which he manifested, when he ate of the forbidden fruit. This disposition, we believe, must be overcome, before any of us can be fit for the kingdom of heaven ; and that the Spirit of God only does overcome and correct it :—yet that He does this by the use of means and motives which leave us as free in conversion and new obedience, as we ever were in transgression.

We do not say, that all mankind “come into life with a *fixed* character, decidedly, entirely, and, *for all they can ever do*, incurably wicked ;”—that is, that all are originally as bad as they can be, and utterly incapable of amendment. On the contrary, reason and scripture unitedly teach us, that there are innumerable degrees of wickedness among men, and that effectual means of cure are put within the reach of all ;—that “a fountain is opened for sin and for uncleanness,” to which “whosoever will” may come and partake of its purifying and life-giving streams. We do not believe that regeneration is “as much the sole act of God, as if the subject of it had been without sense or motion up to the very moment of its occurrence.” Far from it. We have not forgotten the prayer of David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me !”—nor have we forgotten that the same Spirit who indited that petition, has also issued the high command, “Make you a new heart and a new spirit ; for why will ye die ?”—and has put on record, for the encouragement of every humble and self-despairing sinner, the precious promise, “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.”* Christ's people are “willing in the day of his power.”† Their reception of him is voluntary, though it is, at the same time, an evidence that they are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”‡

* Ps. li. 10. Ezek. xviii. 31. and xxxvi. 26. † Ps. cx. 3. ‡ John i. 12, 13.

I have not here attempted a full explanation of the doctrines in question ; nor would I at any time undertake to clear them from all obscurity. (The connexion of dependent and supreme agency in the formation of human character, is a mysterious subject. I have said thus much upon it rather for the purpose of disclaiming sentiments erroneously ascribed to us, than of explaining or defending those which we really hold. We would not add any thing to the interesting and humbling statement of facts given us by the apostle,—“ By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” And the *fact* that we individually sustain the same character with our fallen progenitor, and are consequently under the same liabilities, and the same moral necessities, is surely one of much practical importance, whether we can, in any measure, account for it or not. To collect, therefore, all the unscriptural and injudicious expressions which have been employed in stating it, and by the help of these, to draw from the doctrine a train of illegitimate and horrible inferences, thus strengthening the opposition which such mortifying truth must meet in every unhumiliated heart, is as *unkind* as it is *unfair*. It tends to frighten men away from a subject which most deeply concerns them, and which accordingly claims the closest and most careful investigation.

4. With the doctrines already noticed, are necessarily connected those of Election and Perseverance ; and about these also there is much misconception, and consequently much irrelevant reasoning. The advocates for these doctrines are often represented as saying, that some of mankind are chosen to salvation, and others fore-ordained to destruction, without any regard to their respective characters :—that the elect will be saved, let them conduct as they may ; and the non-elect must fail of salvation, however earnestly they may seek it. But such are not our sentiments. We believe, indeed, that “ Whom God foreknew, he also did predestinate to be *conformed to the image* of his Son ;”—that “ whom he did predestinate, them he also called ;”—and as “ the gifts and calling of God are without repentance,” we believe he will perform the good work which he has begun in them, unto the day

of Jesus Christ ; reserving for them an incorruptible and unfading inheritance in heaven, and keeping them, for that inheritance, by his mighty power, *through faith*, unto salvation. Is this saying that the elect, or even the regenerate, are sure of heaven without any exertion on their own part ? Far from it :—yea, the very *reverse*. They are “chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience.” Hence they are exhorted to “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God that worketh in them to *will* and to *do*, of his own good pleasure.”

We would use “the exceeding great and precious promises” of Him who “hath called us to glory and virtue,” as an encouragement to humble and vigorous and persevering effort ; “that by these we may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” Instead of making these promises a pillow of slothful repose, or a refuge from the claims of personal duty, as if salvation were something quite distinct from holiness, we feel that we must “give diligence to *make our calling and election sure* ;” adding to faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity : and that it is only while we “do these things,” we may rest assured that “we shall never fall.”*

Finally then, dear reader, “be not tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” Take not your religious opinions at second hand ; but while some say one thing, and some another, about the doctrines of grace, search the scriptures daily, whether these things are so ; remembering, especially, that speculative knowledge, however correct, is not enough for you ; but that you must “*believe with the heart unto righteousness*,” before you can “*make confession with the mouth unto salvation*.”

* Let those who so freely speak of Election and Perseverance as doctrines of human invention and of immoral tendency, carefully examine Rom. viii. 1—18 and 28—39, and 1 Pet. i. 1—9, and 2 Pet. i. 1—11 : and they will perhaps perceive that their controversy is not merely with us, but with the inspired apostles of our Lord, and through them, with our Lord himself.

A DENIAL OF THE DIVINE DECREES LEADS TO FATALISM.

It is not uncommon for those, who deny the doctrine of the universal decrees of God, to charge those who believe that he foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, as holding to fatalism ; and consequently as being fatalists. This is used as a term of reproach, at which the minds of many are apt to revolt, and therefore it is believed, that this opprobrious charge has had great influence upon many, and led them to reject the salutary doctrine of God's universal decrees. It is the usual practice with disputers and controversial writers to retort, if possible, the arguments and charges of their opponents, and thus to confound them with their own weapons. The writer of this does not recollect of ever reading or hearing any thing, in which a retort of this charge has been attempted. It is conceived, however, not to be a very difficult, nor even undesirable task to turn back the imputation of fatalism upon those who deny the doctrine of God's sovereign, holy, and universal decrees. Let it then be asserted, that *all those who deny the decrees of God are fatalists* ; and then see if what follows does not support the assertion. What is meant by the universal decrees of God, is not difficult to understand. They are his *eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his own will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass*. God's efficient will, or determination, which gives being to all creatures, things, and events throughout the universe, is his decree. What is meant by fate is, perhaps, more difficult to be clearly understood. There are several senses in which the word fate is used ; but that which is most common is hardly definable. It seems, however, to import some unknown, unintelligent, undescribable, and eternal *destiny*, by which all things are unalterably fixed in an absolute necessary chain of causes and effects. This fate, according to the ancient stoics, was superior to all the heathen gods, who were subject to its decrees. Even omnipotent Jupiter, with all his potent council, could not alter or control the events fixed by this superior destiny. This is the most intelligible view the writer can give of fate.

Now to prove, that they who deny the universal decrees of God are fatalists, we need only the use of this self-evident position, viz. *every event must be the effect of an efficient cause*. This is a fundamental principle of all just reasoning. The whole universe must have an adequate efficient cause of its existence. All the things in the universe must have an efficient cause, which gave them their being and form ; and all events, of every nature and kind, must have a primary cause, by whose efficiency they are produced in their time, place, and manner. This, it seems, is true, beyond all reasonable doubt. Now let the inquiry be made, What is this primary efficient cause of all things ? To what are we to ascribe the existence of things and events ? Is it to be ascribed to the decree of God ? Or is fate their cause ? It must be one or the other of these ; for no third efficient is conceivable or possible. They who believe the doctrine of decrees have no hesitancy in answering, that the decrees of God are the primary cause of all things ; and that their efficiency pervades the universe, giving existence, form and issue to all beings, and to whatsoever comes to pass. But to what cause will the deniers of divine decrees ascribe the being of events and things ? They cannot ascribe it to God, or to his decrees, for the existence of these they deny, and there being no other possible efficient in the universe, they must ascribe all things to fate as their cause. Hence a denial of God's universal decrees, naturally and directly leads to fatalism ; and therefore all such deniers are absolute fatalists.

If the above reasoning be just, then we may easily see the great advantage which the Calvinistic doctrine of universal decrees has over the Arminian denial. Calvinists have a God at the head of the universe—an intelligent, wise, and holy Being, who has established a perfect plan of operation, and is conducting all things by his providence according to design ; or as an apostle of Jesus Christ expresses it, “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” to accomplish the glorious purposes of infinite wisdom and goodness.

OBJECTION TO PRAYER,

DERIVED FROM THE PREDETERMINATION AND IMMUTABILITY OF GOD,—ANSWERED.

Extract from Dwight.



THIS objection is usually stated in terms like the following.

“Prayer is fruitless, because all things are determined from everlasting by an immutable God, and will, therefore, take place according to his determination. Hence our prayers, making no alteration in any thing, must be an idle, perhaps an impious service: idle, because they can effect nothing; impious, because they are expressions of our desires for blessings, which God has not chosen to give. If God has determined to give us these blessings, we shall receive them without prayer. If he has determined not to give them, we shall not receive them, however fervently we may pray. So far, then, as we pray for things, which God has determined to give, our prayers are useless. So far as we pray for those, which he has determined not to give, our prayers are directly opposed to his pleasure.”

I have endeavored to state this objection at full length, because I wish to present it with all the force, which it has, or can have, in the mind of the objector. To the several things, contained in it, I answer,

1. *There cannot possibly be any impiety in prayer.*

“Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will.” To desire that, and that only, which is agreeable to the will of God, cannot be impious. Evangelical prayer supposes in its very nature, that we ask either for those things for which the scriptures have expressly permitted us to pray; or for those which we professedly submit to his will in our petitions. In this conduct, impiety cannot exist. On the contrary, no human being was ever the subject of piety, who did not pursue this conduct.

The objection is now reduced to a single article; viz.

The fruitlessness of prayer ; or its inefficacy to change the purposes of God, and therefore to procure blessings.
To this I answer,

2. *The objection lies, with exactly the same force, against every other human effort, as against prayer.*

If the predetermination and immutability of God render it improper for men to pray, because their prayers cannot change his purposes ; then the same things must render it equally improper for men to plough, sow, reap, or make any other effort for any end whatever. All these, without the divine blessing, will be in vain, and can no more change the purpose of God, than prayer. With just as much propriety and force may the *farmer* say, “It is in vain for me to plough, or sow, or reap : since, if God has determined to give me a crop, I shall have it without either of these efforts. On the contrary, if he has determined not to give me a crop, I shall not have it, however faithfully I may labor. My ploughing, sowing, and reaping, therefore, must be idle, because they will all be fruitless.”

In the same manner may the *student* say, “If God has determined that I should possess learning, I shall possess it without study : but if he has determined that I shall not possess learning, I shall not acquire it, although I study with ever so much diligence.

In the same manner, may every man say concerning his exertions.

This reasoning, were we governed by it, would plainly put an end to all human exertions at once ; and we should neither plough, nor build, nor collect food, or fuel, nor teach, nor study, nor make any other attempt to promote the good, either of ourselves or others. Conclusions, so evidently false as these, and so fraught with necessary mischief, cannot flow from sound principles. Safely, therefore, may we pronounce the proofs, by which they are professedly established, to be hollow and deceitful.

3. *There is a radical and gross error in this objection ; viz. that God has predetermined the end, and not the means.*

This opinion is equally contradictory to the scriptures, and to common sense. *St. Paul*, a little before his shipwreck, was informed by an angel, that God had given

him all them that sailed with him. Yet afterwards, when the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship ; when they had let down the boat into the sea ; Paul said to the centurion, and the soldiers, *except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved.* Acts xxvii. 22, 30, 31. The end here determined, was the preservation of the ship's company. The means indispensable to this end, were the continuance of the seamen in the ship, and their exertions to bring it to land. These were predetermined equally with the end ; and were absolutely necessary to its existence. Equally necessary are ploughing and sowing, rain and sunshine, to the existence of a crop ; studying, to the acquisition of knowledge ; and all other efforts of men, to the purposes which they actually accomplish. All these are equally predetermined with the ends accomplished ; and equally parts of the divine system.

Every part of God's predetermination is founded on exactly the same reason with those, on which the same determination would be founded, if all beings and events had already existed ; and God, in the possession of the same omniscience, should then survey them with a perfect discernment of their natures and relations, form his own determinations concerning them, and pronounce, with respect to every one, his unerring judgment. Of course, his predeterminations are exactly the same with such determinations, as would exist in his mind, after every thing had taken place ; and are all exactly just and right ; such as perfect wisdom and goodness, understanding them entirely, would dictate and approve.

Nor is the *immutability* of God at all more liable to objections. God from everlasting was exactly what all beings ought to wish him to be ; possessed of every excellence in an infinite degree, and the subject of no imperfection, either natural or moral. He knows, and ever knew, all things, both actual and possible. He can do all things ; and is infinitely disposed to do every thing, and that only, which is absolutely right and good. Consequently, there is nothing, there never has been, there never will be, any thing, which, considered merely as a work of God, is not exactly right. In that vast kingdom, which fills immensity and eternity, there will never exist a single being, or event, which perfect wisdom and goodness could wish not to have existed.

Who can rationally desire a change in such a character as this? What would the change be? A change from perfection to imperfection; from knowledge to ignorance; from truth to falsehood; from justice to injustice; from kindness to cruelty; from universal excellence to universal turpitude. Perfection can be changed into nothing but imperfection. The immutability of God is indispensable to the glory of his character, and is itself a part of his perfection: for no mutable being can be perfect in the same sense with one who is immutable. Equally is it the corner stone, on which the universe rests. Were this support taken away, the immense fabric would tumble into ruin. To his creatures there would be neither safety, nor hope: but immensity, and eternity, would be filled with suspense, terror and anguish.

Particularly there would not, in this case, be the least foundation for encouragement in prayer. If all the determinations of God were not settled in heaven, who could divine what new decisions would exist? what new laws? what new systems of administration? Prayer, commanded to-day, might be forbidden to-morrow.—Prayer, acceptable to him to-day, might be hateful to him to-morrow. The things, for which we now ask with certain assurance of being heard, might speedily be denied.—For aught that can be foreseen, the time might speedily, as well as easily, arrive, when under such a dominion, this vast empire might, in a moment of change, be reduced to a desert of ravage and ruin.

As things are actually ordered by God, every part of the system is established on immoveable foundations. Of this unchangeable system, one great and glorious part is, that every humble, faithful prayer, shall be certainly heard, accepted, and answered. Not one ever was, or ever will be, offered up in vain. This scheme of things contains every possible encouragement to pray; and displays the absolute necessity, as well as the superior usefulness and efficacy of prayer. Any other scheme would exceedingly lessen, or entirely destroy, both the encouragement, and the usefulness, of prayer.

So far, then, are the predetermination and immutability of God from preventing and discouraging prayer, that they hold out infinitely more and greater inducements to this duty, than can be furnished in any other manner.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.



Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.—Phil. i. 6.

IN all true believers, a good work has been begun. A new heart has been given them, and a right spirit has been put within them. They are not, however, perfectly sanctified; but a sanctifying process has commenced, which will be carried on, till they arrive at the fulness of the stature of perfect men in Christ. Of this fact, the apostle expresses his confident assurance in the text above cited.

This text, it is believed, teaches clearly the doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance. As this doctrine is often called in question, and supposed by some to be of dangerous tendency, I propose in this tract,

I. To examine some of the most plausible objections which have been urged against it.

II. To adduce some of the evidence by which it is supported.

It may be proper, however, before I proceed to a discussion of the subject, to state definitely the question at issue.

The question is not, whether true believers ever fall into sin. It is admitted that they do. *A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.* Prov. xxiv. 16.

The question is not, whether persons who profess religion, and appear to possess it, may fall away and perish. That this is sometimes the case, is evinced by observation and the word of God.

The question is not, whether true believers, considered in themselves merely, are *in danger* of final apostacy. It is admitted that if God has not promised to keep them, there is no certainty of their perseverance.

The question is not, whether a true saint who falls into sin, will be saved *if* he should die impenitent. It is undeniable, that no person, whether a saint or a sinner, can be pardoned without repentance. The point at issue, is, whether a true saint will be suffered to fall and die impenitent.

The question is not, whether a true believer will be saved, whether he endure to the end or not. It is certain that those only will be saved, who shall endure to the end. The point which I maintain, is, that all true believers will endure to the end.

The question is not, whether saints will persevere without their own exertions. This is evidently impossible; as much so, as it would be, to run without moving. To persevere without their own exertions, would be to persevere without perseverance.

But the question is this: whether any who have been born of the Spirit, justified by grace, and adopted as God's children, will be left to utter and final apostacy? Or whether God has not promised that all such shall persevere in faith and holiness to the end of life and be saved?

Before I proceed to state and answer objections, I will just mention what it is incumbent on the objector to prove. He must prove that some real saints have utterly and finally apostatized; or that some will thus apostatize.

It is nothing to his purpose to show, that Christians are commanded to persevere. The question is, whether they do or do not obey the command. Surely, it is not sound reasoning to infer from a command, that those to whom it is given, will disobey it. All the saints and angels in heaven are commanded to persevere;—and are we hence to conclude, that more or less of them, will yet apostatize?

Nor is it to the objector's purpose to show, that if real saints should fall away and die impenitent, they would be lost. That this would be the consequence is certain. And it is equally certain that if Gabriel should apostatize, he would be cast down to hell; and are we hence to infer that Gabriel will apostatize?

Nor is it to the objector's purpose to show, that saints are cautioned against apostacy. It becomes him to prove,

that these cautions will not be made effectual to prevent their apostacy.

Nor is it to his purpose to show, that the promises of salvation are conditional. He must show that some true believers will fail of complying with the conditions.

Nor is it to his purpose to show, that real saints have sometimes fallen into great sins. It is incumbent on him to prove that their apostacy was total and final.

Nor is it to his purpose to show, that persons who once professed religion, and who appeared to possess it, have fallen away and perished. It becomes him to prove that they were true saints.

Let these remarks be kept in view, while we proceed to examine the objections against the doctrine under consideration.

1. One of the most plausible objections, which has ever been urged against this doctrine, is derived from the following passage of scripture. Ezek. xviii. 24. "But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die."

It may admit of a question, whether the term *righteous* in this passage was intended to denote a real saint. Persons are often spoken of in the scriptures according to their apparent or visible character. By the *righteous*, here may be meant, one who is only *reputed* to be such; and the sentiment of the passage may be, that whatever evidence a man may give of genuine piety, yet if he shall apostatize, all his former appearance of religion shall be regarded as worthless, and he shall be treated according to his real character.

But supposing a true saint to be denoted by the term *righteous* in this passage; it is not asserted that a righteous man will turn away from his righteousness; but only that *should* he thus turn away, he would die. A supposition is expressed, and a consequence stated. It is admitted, that the consequence would follow, if the thing supposed should take place. But the question is, whether the thing supposed ever will take place. That it will,

can by no means be inferred with certainty from the supposition; because there are many hypothetical cases stated in the Bible, when it is certain that the thing supposed never will take place. Take the following. Levit. xviii. 5. "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments, which *if* a man do, he shall live in them." The meaning of this passage is, as appears from Rom. x. 5, and Gal. iii. 12, that if a man should obey perfectly the law of God, he would be justified by his own works. And are we hence to infer, that any mere man ever did, or ever will obey perfectly the whole law? especially when it is declared, Rom. iii. 20, "By the deeds of the law, ~~there shall no flesh be justified.~~" Again. Paul said, Gal. i. 8, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." And may we hence infer that an angel from heaven ever will preach another gospel? If I were to say, when an Ethiopian shall change his skin, or a leopard his spots, then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil; should I be understood to affirm, that an Ethiopian ever did, or ever will change his skin, or a leopard his spots? Or if I were to say, when a camel shall go through the eye of a needle, then a rich man may enter into the kingdom of heaven; should I be understood to assert, that a camel ever did, or ever will go through the eye of a needle?

Supposing the term 'righteous' to denote a true saint, the text under consideration may be regarded as the statement of a strong case, to illustrate more clearly and forcibly the subject under consideration. God is vindicating his character against the aspersions of his enemies. They alleged that his ways were not equal; that he punished children for the sins of their parents. He repels this allegation, and assures them, that every individual is treated according to his own personal character. He affirms that all who repent and reform, shall live; and that all who persist in their sins shall die; and to show clearly the equality of his dealings, he makes the supposition, that if even a righteous man should turn from his righteousness, and do according to the abominations that the wicked man doeth, he should die. But this is not deciding the question, whether a truly right

eous man ever will thus apostatize. This question is left to be settled by other parts of the scriptures.

I will now refer you to one or two passages, which expressly assert that a truly righteous man never will thus apostatize. Job xvii. 9. "The righteous shall hold on his way." Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord;—though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." Here we have direct assertions against the utter apostacy of the truly righteous. And are such plain assertions to be set aside by inferences drawn from hypothetical declarations?

2. We are referred to a parable of our Saviour, recorded Matt. xviii. 23—35.* This parable has been supposed to teach the doctrine, that after sinners have been pardoned, they may so sin, as finally to perish.

To obviate this objection, permit me to make a remark, in regard to the interpretation of parables. A parable is a story related at length, for the purpose of illustrating some important truth. But it is not to be supposed, that every incident related in a parable can be literally applied; because in comparing spiritual things with natural, the comparison will not always hold in every particular. Take, for example, the parable of the treasure hid in a field. Matt. xiii. 44. If every incident in this parable is literally applied, we shall prove, that when a man hath obtained religion, it is his duty to conceal it. By a similar mode of interpretation, we may prove from the parable of the unjust steward, Luke xvi. that we ought to practice fraud and dishonesty to obtain friends in heaven. It is always dangerous to raise a doctrine from an incident related in a parable. Every parable is designed to illustrate some important truth, and that truth may always be ascertained by attending to its general scope. So in the parable before us, the obvious sentiment is, that we must exercise a spirit of forgiveness, in order to expect to be forgiven of God.

But let us for a moment take the ground of the objector, and see to what consequences it will lead us. When sinners are pardoned, God says, *their sins and iniquities*

* I do not quote the parable on account of its length.

will I remember no more. But those who perish will be punished for all their sins. They shall have judgment without mercy, and receive for all the deeds done here in the body. Suppose then a person should fall away and perish after he has been pardoned. In that case, he will be punished for sins which God has forgiven, and which he has promised to remember no more.

3. We are referred to the parable of the ten virgins. Matt. xxv. The foolish virgins, it has been supposed, represent apostates from true religion. But it is very obvious, that this parable was designed to show the danger of self deception, not of falling from grace. The foolish virgins represent false professors, who never were truly converted. But with an air of triumph, it has been asked, if their lamps were never lighted, how could they go out? By whom is it said, that their lamps went out? Not by our Saviour, but by the foolish virgins themselves. *They said unto the wise, give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out.* But if their lamps were lighted, as they undoubtedly supposed they were, with what were they lighted? Not with oil, surely, which is the emblem of grace; for it is said expressly that they took their lamps, and took no oil with them. And besides, they were foolish virgins when they took their lamps. It is not said, that they were all wise, and that five became foolish, but that *five of them were wise, and five were foolish.* Nothing can be more evident, than that the foolish virgins denote false professors, who never were true believers.

4. We are referred to John xv. 2. "Every branch in me, that beareth not fruit, he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." In this passage, it has been supposed, there is an intimation, that true believers may become so unfruitful, as to be finally separated from Christ. But perhaps, upon close examination, it will be found to contain a very different sentiment. Wherever true grace exists in the heart, it will produce some fruit. Every true believer, therefore, is a branch which does bring forth some fruit; "and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." All true believers, therefore, will be made fruitful, and will

persevere. By the branch that beareth not fruit, we are evidently to understand, one who is not a true believer; one, who, though he may be in the visible church, which is Christ's mystical body, and consequently a visible member of Christ, has never been united to him by a living faith.

5. We are referred to Rom. xi. 17. "And if some of the branches were broken off, and thou being a wild olive tree wert grafted in among them," &c. By the olive tree, is meant the visible church. The branches which were broken off, were the Jews, who in the days of our Saviour rejected the gospel. And were these Jews believers, and did they fall from grace? Let every one read and judge.

6. We are referred to Gal. v. 4. "Whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace." The objection raised from this passage, is merely a play upon words. The apostle is showing that none are justified by the works of the law; and the obvious meaning of this passage is, that those who hold to justification by works, did thereby renounce the idea of salvation by grace. It does not mean that they had fallen from a state of justification; but that they had fallen off, and turned away from the doctrine of grace. They had renounced the gospel plan of salvation, and substituted a self-righteous scheme in its stead. Now who had done this? Were they those who had once been real believers? Nothing like this is intimated.

7. We are referred to that noted passage, Heb. vi. 4—6. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance."*

* If this text proves that real Christians ever fall from grace, it as decisively proves, that they cannot be again renewed. It is said, however, that it relates to high attainments in grace. But is not all which is here affirmed true of every real Christian? Has not every true Christian been enlightened, and been made partaker of the Holy Ghost? Has not every Christian tasted of the heavenly gift, and of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come? If so, then no real Christian can fall from grace, and be again restored. It is certain, therefore, that Noah, Lot, David, Solomon and Peter never fell from grace.

Whether the true meaning of this passage can be ascertained or not, it is easy to show that it does not militate against the doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance. Before it can be made to militate against this doctrine, two things need to be proved. 1. That what is here stated, cannot be truly affirmed of any but real christians. And 2. That it is here affirmed, that the persons spoken of may fall away. It is very questionable, whether either of these points can be satisfactorily established.

Let us inquire, (1.) Whether all which is here stated, may not be affirmed of some, who have enjoyed great privileges, and had powerful awakenings, but who have never been truly and savingly converted to God. *To be enlightened*, it will be admitted, is no certain evidence of a justified state. *To taste of the heavenly gift, and of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come*, may possibly denote no more, than what was experienced by the stony ground hearers. They received the word with joy, but having no root in themselves, endured only for a time. As to the expression, *and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost*, it is admitted that many enjoy the strivings of the Spirit, whose hearts are never renewed. It is evident moreover, that in the days of the apostles, some were endued with the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, who were never savingly converted. In this delineation of character, there is no mention of holiness, of love to God, or of faith in Christ; and is it not possible that the apostle had in his eye, persons who had never passed from death unto life?

This interpretation is corroborated by what is said in the succeeding verses, particularly in ver. 9. "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, though we thus speak." If the apostle had been describing the experience of a true believer, and not only so, but the highest attainments in Christian experience, as has been supposed; what were those *better things* which he was persuaded his Hebrew brethren possessed? And if he did not believe in the certain perseverance of the saints, how could he be so confident that those better things would *accompany salvation*? These considerations render it, at least, very questionable, whether this passage was intended to be descriptive of Christian experience.

But (2.) Admitting that what is here said, can be affirmed of none but real saints; still, it is not asserted that any such ever will fall away, any more than it was asserted by Paul, that an angel from heaven will preach another gospel. All that is affirmed, is, that *if* they shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. But this does not decide the point whether any will thus apostatize.

8. We are referred to Heb. x. 29. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing?" The objection raised from this passage, is founded on the expression *sanctified* by the blood of the covenant. But this evidently refers to the Son of God, and not to the person who had trodden him under foot. Observe the construction of the sentence, "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith *HE* (i. e. the Son of God) was sanctified," &c. Agreeable to John x. 36. "Say ye of him whom the Father hath *sanctified*," &c. And Heb. xii. 20. "The great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." This passage, therefore, is altogether irrelevant.

9. We are referred to 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

This passage, it will be remarked, is entirely hypothetical; but I do not insist on this, because it is evident that the persons here described were not true believers. There are multitudes, upon whose minds the great truths of the gospel make such an impression for a time, as to influence them to reform their lives: and that nothing more than an external reformation is alluded to in this passage, is evident from the next verse. "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog

is returned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." These comparisons clearly show, that no change of character had been wrought in these apostates. The dog that casts up what was offensive to his stomach, still loves it, and again greedily devours it ; and the swine that was washed, is a swine still, and loves the mire. Their natures are not changed. So these specious formalists, not being renewed in the temper of their minds, returned again to their beloved iniquities, and became worse than before.

10. We are referred to Rev. xxii. 19. "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

To understand this passage, it is necessary to bear in mind a remark which has already been made ; that persons are frequently spoken of in the scriptures, according to their apparent or visible character. They are consequently represented as possessing what they seem to possess, and as losing it, when it becomes manifest that they do not possess it. In support of this idea, observe these words of our Saviour. Matt. xiii. 12. "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance ; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even *that he hath*." This is explained in a parallel text. Luke viii. 18. "Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even *that which he seemeth to have*." When it is said, therefore, in the text under consideration, that "God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city," the meaning evidently is, God shall make it manifest that he has no part or lot in these things. He shall take from him that which he seemeth to have.

11. An objection against the doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance, is raised from the cautions given to Christians against apostacy.

In reply to this objection, it may be observed, that God treats his people as free agents, and governs them by the influence of motives. He gives them commands, and cautions, and warnings ; and it is by the effectual application of these means, that their perseverance is secured.

The fact that God has promised to keep saints from falling, is no reason why these cautions and warnings should not be addressed to them ; for these are means by which he accomplishes his promise. When Paul was shipwrecked in his voyage to Rome, God appeared to him and promised that the lives of all who were with him should be saved. But this promise did not render their own exertions needless. Accordingly, when the sailors who only knew how to manage the vessel, were about to make their escape, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, *except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved.* God had determined to fulfil his promise by the instrumentality of these means ; and the continuance of the sailors in the ship, was rendered as certain by the promise, as the event of their final deliverance. Take another example. God promised to Hezekiah, that fifteen years should be added to his life. But the common means of preserving life, were not thereby rendered needless. Accordingly he was directed to use means for the restoration of his health ; and it was just as necessary that he should eat and drink as it ever had been ; and it would have been perfectly proper to say to him, except you eat and drink you cannot live. The promise of God made it as certain that he would eat and drink, as that his life would be prolonged. So it is perfectly proper to say to believers, except you endure to the end, you cannot be saved ;—and if you utterly apostatize, you will certainly be lost, although God has promised that all true believers shall endure to the end.

12. It is objected, that the doctrine vindicated in this tract, is contradicted by facts. We are told that there are instances recorded in the scriptures of the total apostacy of real saints ; some of whom were again restored, and others finally lost. As examples, we are referred to Noah, Lot, David, Solomon, Peter, Saul, Judas, Hymeneus, Philetus, Alexander and Demas.

This objection, so far as it relates to those who are supposed to have fallen away, and been brought to repentance, is refuted by the passage in Hebrews, in which it is said, *if they shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.* The passage in Ezekiel which we have already considered, is equally decisive. So also

is the following. "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, that shall devour the adversaries."

In regard to those who once appeared to be Christians, and who have totally and finally apostatized, the apostle John has given us ample information. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us." 1 John ii. 19. This text settles the question as to the previous character of all apostates. If they had been true believers, they would no doubt have continued so. You may produce ever so many instances of total apostacy, and this text teaches us in what light to regard them. They never were believers. There is another text which decides this point. Matt. vii. 22, 23. "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, *I never knew you*, (i. e. as my disciples.) But if any of these had been Christians, Christ did once *know* them; for he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I *know* them." Again, "The foundation of God standeth sure, the Lord *knoweth* them that are his." But he will say to them all, "*I never knew you*, depart from me, ye that work iniquity." There is a third text, equally decisive. 1 John, iii. 6. "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."

Persons may go to great lengths in the externals of religion, while their hearts are unrenewed. We read of those who have a form of godliness without the power; and of stony-ground hearers, who receive the word with joy, but having no root in themselves, endure only for a time. We read of tares among the wheat, and of foolish virgins among the wise, who have no oil in their lamps. These representations sufficiently account for all those apostacies of which we read, and which we witness.

13. It is objected that this is a very dangerous doctrine; that it leads to licentiousness; that it tends to

render Christians careless, and that to preach it is the direct way to destroy souls.

In reply to this, it may be said, if it is taught in the Bible, we may know that it has no such tendency, for every doctrine of the Bible is according to godliness. That it may be perverted by hypocrites and wicked men, is not denied; and what doctrine of the Bible has not been perverted? That it tends to render real Christians careless, I cannot believe. Show me the man who takes encouragement from this doctrine to sin, and I will show you the man who has never tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

In this objection two things are taken for granted, which are far from being true. One is, that persons may know that they have been converted, while they choose to live in sin. The other is, that a fear of punishment is the only motive by which Christians are influenced. But neither of these things is true. No man has any good evidence that he has been converted, unless he finds himself disposed to persevere in holiness. One characteristic of true religion is, it is a religion that endures. And if a person finds that his religion does not endure, he has reason to conclude that it was not genuine religion. This doctrine presents no opiate to quiet him in his sins. It is as full of terror to the backslider, as the doctrine of falling from grace.

But further. Suppose that the real Christian knew that he had been converted; this would have no tendency to render him careless, for he is not prompted to duty by mercenary motives. He serves God because he loves to serve him. And when a person feels, that if he were sure of heaven, he should indulge freely in sin, it is a certain evidence that his heart is not right with God. The doctrine of perseverance, therefore, has no such tendency as has been represented.

14. It is said that Adam fell, and angels fell, and why may not saints fall?

I reply,—There is nothing in the nature of holiness to secure saints from falling; and if God has not secured them, by promise, there is no security. But Adam was placed under the covenant of works. In that covenant there was no promise to secure him from falling. Be-

lievers are placed under the covenant of grace, a covenant *established upon better promises*. Of these one is that they shall be *kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation*. If it were not for this fact, I see no reason to hope that any will persevere. Adam fell when he was perfectly holy. Believers are but partially sanctified; and assailed as they are by foes without, and foes within, what hope is there that they will stand, if God has not promised to keep them?

Besides—If the covenant of grace does not secure the perseverance of believers, I see not but they may apostatize in heaven, if any should be so happy as to arrive there. Angels fell, and saints in heaven will not be more holy than angels. How do we know, then, that all who have been saved, and all who will be saved, will not hereafter apostatize and perish? And is it so? Is the eternal salvation of God's people left in such uncertainty? No, my brethren—God will put out the sun and moon and all the stars—He will burn up this world—but he will first gather together his elect.

Having considered the most common objections against the doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance, I proceed as was proposed,

II. To adduce some of the evidence by which it is established.

That all true saints will infallibly persevere is evident.

1. From the nature of the covenant of redemption. By the covenant of redemption is meant the covenant between the Father and the Son, in which God promised to Christ, that he should have a seed, and see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. (See Isa. liii. 10, 11.) Of this promised seed Christ speaks, when he says, *all that the Father giveth me, shall come to me.* Now will any of these be lost? If so, where is Christ's security that he shall have a seed? And what evidence is there, that the whole plan of redemption will not be frustrated? There is no more security that one saint will persevere, than that another will, and if we admit that one may utterly apostatize, we must admit that it is totally uncertain whether one will be saved. The whole scheme of redemption is consequently left at uncertainties. And is it so? Did Christ come down from heaven and die for

sinners, when there was no certainty that his death would not be in vain? And can we suppose that in all those things which relate to the plan of salvation, God may finally be disappointed? But our Saviour has set this subject beyond all reasonable doubt. He has said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh unto me *I will in no wise cast out.*"* "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them *eternal life*; and they *shall never perish*, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."† "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give *eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*"‡ "And this is the Father's will that hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, *I should lose nothing*, but should raise it up at the last day."§

2. I argue the certain perseverance of the saints from the nature of the covenant of grace. By the covenant of grace is meant the covenant which exists between God and the believer. In this covenant God promises to believers, that he *will be* their God, and that they *shall be* his people.

It has been said, however, that the promises are all conditional, and that if believers fail to perform the conditions, they cut themselves off from the promised blessings.

Now I admit, that salvation is offered conditionally, but I maintain, that in the covenant of grace, God not only promises salvation on certain conditions, but that he actually promises to his people the conditions themselves, i. e. that they shall perform the conditions. If this can be shown, the doctrine of perseverance will be established upon an immoveable basis.

I will now refer you to some promises of this description. Job xvii. 9. "The righteous shall hold on his way." Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord—though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand." 1 Pet. i. 5. "Who are kept by the power

* John vi. 37. † John x. 27—29. ‡ John xvii. 2. § John vi. 39.

of God through faith unto salvation." Ps. xxxvii. 28. "For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints: they are *preserved forever*." 2 Thes. iii. 3, 4. "The Lord is faithful, who shall establish you and keep you from evil. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do, and will do the things which we command you." 1 Cor. i. 8. "Who shall also confirm you unto the end." Jer. xxxi. 31, 34. "Behold the days come saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant, that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people:—for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will *remember their sin no more*." Jer. xxxii. 38—40. "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, and will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their heart, that *they shall not depart from me*."

You will notice the terms, in which the promises of this covenant are expressed. God not only promises to believers, that he will be their God, *if they will be his people*, but he promises that they *shall be his people*. He promises to write his law upon their hearts, and to put his fear in their hearts that they *shall not depart from him*. These promises are absolute. They are suspended on no condition whatever; for they include the conditions on which salvation is promised. God not only engages to give eternal life to believers, if they endure to the end; but in the promises which have been cited, he actually engages that they shall endure to the end.

3. I argue the certain perseverance of all true believers, from the fact, that there is such a thing as assurance of salvation. Many of the ancient saints expressed the fullest assurance of arriving at heaven. This was the

case with Job, David, Paul, and others. But if saints may fall from grace, there can be no such thing as assurance of salvation. Suppose a person to know that he is a Christian to-day ;—how does he know that he shall not fall before to-morrow, or at any rate before he dies. If David, and Peter, and Judas fell from grace, what saint can be sure that he shall stand ? How then could Job say, “ I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another.” How dare the Psalmist say, “ As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.” How dare Paul say, “ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day.” And how dare John say, “ We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Such confident assurance, must certainly be presumption, if God has not promised to preserve his people from utter and final apostacy.

4. I argue the perseverance of the saints from the immutability of God. If true religion were obtained by human efforts merely, it would be rational to suppose that it might be lost. But if it is God who begins the good work in the hearts of believers, and if he is an unchangeable being, we cannot suppose that he will leave his work incomplete. Why should God renew the heart of a sinner, unless it is his design to bring that sinner to heaven ? And will he suffer his design to be frustrated ? What motive can he have to abandon the work ? Will it be said, that he leaves them to fall and perish, on account of their sins ? But were they not sinners, and utterly unworthy of his favor, when he undertook the work of their salvation ? And if when they were *dead in sin*, he had mercy on them, and raised them to spiritual life, can we suppose that he will be provoked utterly to forsake them ? The apostle thus reasons, Rom. v. 10. “ For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son ; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

5. That all true believers will persevere, is evident from their union to Christ. By faith they become one

with Christ, and their life and interests are identified with his. Accordingly, he says, John xiv. 19. "Because I live, ye shall live also." And the apostle says, Col. iii. 3, 4. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." These texts represent the salvation of believers as certain as the eternal felicity of Christ.

6. I argue the certain perseverance of the saints, from those texts which represent the salvation of all the *elect*, as certain. I will not here insist on the meaning of election, as I understand it, but I will take it in the sense usually understood by those who deny the doctrine of perseverance. They will allow, that persons are elected when they believe; in other words, that real Christians are styled in scripture the *elect*. If then it can be made to appear, that all the *elect* will be saved, the idea of falling from grace must be given up. In reference to this point, see Matt. xxiv. 24. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that *if it were possible*, they shall deceive the very elect." It is obviously implied in this passage, that it is *impossible* for any of the elect to be so deceived as to be finally lost. Ver. 31. "And he shall send his angels and *they shall gather together his elect*, from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." We are here taught, that God will at last gather all his elect into his kingdom. See also Rom. viii. 33. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." And chap. xi. 7. "The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded." Now these texts prove conclusively, that all the elect will be saved; and it makes no difference, as it respects the subject under present discussion, whether we suppose them elected from eternity, or when they believed. If all the elect will be saved, the perseverance of the saints is secured. In connexion with the above, take another text. Acts xiii. 48. "As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed." Here we are taught, that those who believe, are ordained to eternal life. All true believers then will persevere.

7. I argue the certain perseverance of all believers, from

the intercession of Christ. "If any man sin," saith the apostle John, "we have an advocate with the Father, even Christ the righteous."* "Who is he that condemneth?" saith Paul; "it is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."† And again, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.‡

We may learn something of the nature of Christ's intercession, by attending to the prayer which he offered up for his disciples, just before he suffered. This is a specimen of the intercession, which he continually maketh for the saints. In this prayer, we find the following petitions. "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me—Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are—I pray not, that thou shouldest take them out of the world; but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil—Sanctify them through thy truth—Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us—Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, should be with me, where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me."§

You will remark, that Christ prays for all whom the Father hath given him; not only those who were his disciples in the days of his flesh, but for all who should believe on him to the end of the world. And what does he pray for? He prays that God would keep them through his own name—that he would keep them from evil—that he would sanctify them through his truth, and that they may all hereafter be with him and behold his glory. He does not barely pray that God would save them, if they do not apostatize—He goes farther. He prays that God would keep them from apostatizing.

The question is now reduced to a single point. Is Christ's intercession prevalent or not? Does God always

* 1 John ii. 1.

† Rom. viii. 34.

‡ Heb. vii. 25.

§ John xvii. 9, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21, 24.

hear and answer his requests, or does he not? On this point you shall have the testimony of Christ himself. John xi. 41, 42. "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I knew that *thou hearest me always.*" Since then Christ prays for his people that God would keep them, and since God always hears his prayers, their perseverance is infallibly secured.

In addition to the foregoing arguments, I will now adduce a number of texts which have not yet been quoted, and which either expressly assert or clearly imply the doctrine in question. Psalm lxxxiv. 7. "They go from strength to strength, *every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.*" Prov. x. 29. "The way of the Lord is strength to the upright, *the righteous shall never be removed.*" Prov. iv. 18. "The path of the just is as the shining light, *that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*" Isa. xliii. 25. "I, even I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, *and will not remember thy sins.*" Chap. xlix. 15. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, *but I will not forget thee.*" Chap. liv. 7—10. "For a small moment, have I forsaken thee; *but with great mercies will I gather thee.* In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, *but with everlasting kindness, will I have mercy on thee,* saith the Lord, thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters should no more go over the earth, *so have I sworn, that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee;* for the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, *but my kindness shall not depart from thee; neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed,* saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Ezek. xxvi. 25—29. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you;—A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh: And I will put my Spirit within you; *and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.*"

Such, and much more abundant, is the testimony of

the Old Testament. Let us now turn to the New Testament. And first, let us attend to some of the words of our Saviour which have not yet been quoted. He has taught us, that if our house be founded on a rock it will stand, and if it fall, it will be because it is built upon the sand. He says, John v. 34. "He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, *and shall not come into condemnation.*" Chap. xi. 26. "Whosoever liveth and believeth on me, *shall never die.*" Chap. iv. 14. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, *shall never thirst*; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water *springing up into everlasting life.*" Chap. vi. 51. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, *he shall live forever.*" Ver. 54. "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, *hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*" Matt. xviii. 14. "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven *that one of these little ones should perish.*" Luke x. 42. "Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her."

The time would fail me to quote all the texts which might be collected from the epistles of the apostles. Out of the many which might be adduced, take the following. Rom. vi. 14. "*Sin shall not have dominion over you,* for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Chap. viii. 29, 30. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son—Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, *them he also glorified.*" Observe, all who are justified will be glorified." Eph. i. 13, 14. "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, *which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.*"* Heb. vi. 17—19. "Wherein God willing more abundantly to show unto the *heirs of salvation, the immu-*

* "An earnest is something paid beforehand, to confirm a bargain, of the same kind with the full sum, and as a pledge and security for the payment of the whole. And if in this matter the Spirit is both a seal and an earnest, the bargain cannot be disannulled; but upon whomsoever God bestows the first fruits, he gives them as an earnest of the complete enjoyment of the heavenly inheritance."—*Taggart on Perseverance.*

tability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, *we might have strong consolation*, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us ; which hope we have *as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.*"

It would be easy to swell this list of texts if it was necessary ; but what has been adduced is deemed amply sufficient to satisfy every candid and unprejudiced mind.

Let the subject of this Tract be applied,

I. By way of self-examination. Let all who hope they are Christians, examine themselves, whether they have this evidence of their good estate, that they persevere in holiness. We learn from this subject, that all true Christians will persevere. The righteous shall hold on his way—The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day—They go from strength to strength—Grace in the heart is like a little leaven hid in three measures of meal, which gradually leavens the whole lump. Every real Christian grows in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is not, however, to be supposed, that the true Christian is always making actual progress in the divine life. There is such a thing as a good man's falling into sin, without being utterly cast down ; yet he is on the whole making progress in holiness. Even his falls are made a means of his growth in grace. This was unquestionably the case with David and Peter. They were more humble, more watchful, and more diligent after their falls, than they ever were before. And this no doubt is the case with every Christian. No man therefore has a right to conclude that he has been converted, unless he does on the whole make progress in religion. Unless he finds that God is carrying on a good work in his heart, he will look in vain, for any substantial evidence that such a work has been begun.

How then is it with you, dear reader ? This subject presents to you no motive to carelessness and negligence. If you are wandering from God, it sounds an awful alarm in your ears. It teaches you to tremble, lest you should prove at last to be but a foolish virgin, who took your

lamp and took no oil with it. If any person thinks he has been converted, and takes encouragement from this doctrine to live in sin, it is a certain sign that he is deceiving his own soul. Examine yourself, then, whether *you* be in the faith. Do you grow in grace? Are you on the whole making progress in holiness? Do you on the whole grow more humble, more watchful, more heavenly-minded, and more weaned from the world? This will be the case, if your house is founded on a rock. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Not that there is danger of falling from grace; but there is danger of deceiving yourself with a hypocrite's hope, and making it manifest at last that your house was built upon the sand.

2. This subject should fill our minds with adoring thoughts of the grace of God. It is not by any inherent strength of their own, that the saints hold on their way. They are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. Were they left to themselves, they would undoubtedly fall. It is God who begins the good work in their hearts, and it is he who carries it on to perfection. And this he does, not because they deserve his favor, but all of free, rich, and sovereign grace. From first to last, the salvation of believers is effected by divine grace. It was of grace, that they were given to Christ. It is of grace, that they are brought to repentance. It is of grace, that they are pardoned. It is of grace, that they are sanctified and kept from falling. And it will be of grace, that they will be finally acquitted and welcomed to heaven.

“ Grace all the work shall crown,
Through everlasting days;
It lays in heaven, the topmost stone,
And well deserves the praise.”

Think, O! think, dear reader, on the wonders of that grace, which does so much for rebels that deserve eternal banishment from God. 'Tis a thought sufficient, one would imagine, to melt a heart of adamant. O! 'tis a thought which will swell the notes of the redeemed forever.

3. This subject speaks consolation to the humble

Christian. The true believer has his house built upon the rock of ages. It is a sure foundation, and though the rains descend, and the winds blow, and the floods come, and beat upon his house, it shall not fall. It shall survive "the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds." The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but God's kindness shall not depart from his people, nor shall the covenant of his peace be removed.

Rejoice then, believer in the Lord. The everlasting God is your father and your friend. He has sworn by himself that in blessing, he will bless you; that he will be your God and that you shall be of his people. He snatched you from the jaws of death. He has adopted you as his child. He has set a mark upon your forehead. He has enstamped his image on your heart; and he will suffer no one to pluck you out of his hands. He will keep you as in the hollow of his hand, and as the apple of his eye. Though for a small moment, he may forsake you, yet with great mercies he will gather you; though in a little wrath, he may hide his face from you for a moment, yet with everlasting kindness he will have mercy on you. Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Christ. In his father's house, there are many mansions. He has gone to prepare a place for you, and he will come again and receive you to himself. Because he lives, you shall live also. Your life is hid with Christ in God; and when he who is your life shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory. In this world, you must expect tribulation; but be of good cheer, Christ has overcome the world. Fear not your enemies. Tremble not at the dangers which surround your path. Faint not under your trials. Hope in God, for you shall yet praise him, who is the health of your countenance, and your God.

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THE DECREES OF GOD

CONSISTENT WITH THE

FREE MORAL AGENCY OF MAN.



THE reader probably knows, that people in general are exceedingly perplexed on the subject of the decrees of God, and the free, moral agency of man. The common complaint is, that they cannot see how man can be free, while all his actions are decreed. And on this subject individuals frequently dwell for years, without getting forward a step, or knowing any thing more, either with respect to the decrees of God or the agency of man, than when they first began their inquiries. The reason is, they inquire not whether it is a fact that God has decreed the actions of men or not, and whether they are in fact free agents or not, but *how* can these two doctrines be consistent with each other, forgetting that truth is always consistent with itself, and that the only proper way of determining whether they are consistent, is to ascertain the fact whether they are true. If they would only begin their inquiries in this way, and pursue them with prayerfulness and candor, they would soon come to a satisfactory result.

The axiom in mathematics, "that things which are equal to the same are equal to each other," is not more plain, than that things which agree with truth are consistent with each other.

Is it then a fact, that God has decreed the actions of men? or in other words, that he has determined beforehand what they shall do? To this, it is unhesitatingly replied, he has. The proof of it from the Bible is full and explicit. The short space which can now be devoted to this part of the subject, however, will admit of but a small part of this proof. The reader will here be pre-

sented with a few passages of scripture, in which the conduct of individuals is said expressly to have been determined, and a few others in which it was foretold, and on these the proof of the point in question will be suffered to rest.

It is said respecting the manner in which Christ was betrayed, and led to crucifixion, "Truly the Son of man goeth as it was *determined*, but wo unto that man by whom he is betrayed." The last clause of this verse, as well as the manner in which it is introduced, shows beyond a doubt that reference is here had to the conduct of Judas in betraying his master, and this conduct is expressly said to be "*determined*." The deliverance of Christ to the Jews by Pilate, and their crucifixion of him, are both said to have been determined by him who governs the world. When addressing the Jews on this very subject, Peter says, "Him being delivered by the *determinate* counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." To say that the conduct of men is according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," is certainly saying nothing less than that he has decreed it. But the words of the disciples, in the prayer which they offered upon hearing the report of Peter and John, are, if possible, still more explicit in regard to a divine purpose in the conduct of those who were instrumental in putting Christ to death. In this they say, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel *determined* before to be done." The language here used necessarily implies that all which the multitude were gathered together to do, was predetermined or decreed. It cannot, without doing violence to most approved principles of interpretation, be construed to mean any thing less than this. Now if the conduct of Judas, and Herod, the Jews and the Romans on this occasion was decreed, it is certainly natural to infer that the conduct of men in all other instances is decreed. No objections can be made to the decrees of God in any case, which do not lie with equal force against them in these. And if no objection can disprove them

in these, it certainly cannot in any other. Besides, instances in which the conduct of men is said to be decreed, are numerous in the scriptures. They are found in every part of the sacred volume. The conduct of the righteous as well as the wicked, the conduct of private as well as public characters, the conduct of individuals as well as bodies of men, are repeatedly mentioned in the scriptures as objects of a divine purpose or determination. Your attention has been called to one or two instances only, merely because there is not time to name them all. Instances in which the *sinful* conduct of individuals is said to have been predetermined, have been selected, not because such instances are more numerous than others, but merely because people in general are more disposed to deny the purpose of God in these than in others. It is well known that the good conduct of the disciples in receiving Christ, in obeying him, and in attempting to promote the interests of his kingdom in the world, was decreed. Of this our Saviour informed them in the following words: "Ye have not *chosen* me, but I have *chosen* you, and *ordained* you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." The conduct of Paul in embracing that Saviour whom he once persecuted, and his faithful and successful efforts to spread the knowledge of his name among the nations of the earth, is expressly mentioned as an object of a divine determination. When Ananias objected to going and laying his hands on him, according to the command of the Lord received in a vision, on account of the evil which he had before done to the church, the Lord said, "Go thy way; for he is a *chosen* vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Paul speaks of his own reception of Christ, and that of the Ephesian Christians, with their subsequent holiness and happiness, as something which God in the exercise of his own sovereign pleasure had decreed. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

If the reader is not convinced by these express declarations of scripture, that the actions of men, both good and bad, are decreed, let him consider, that it is an undoubted fact, that God *foreknew* them. If he is perfect in knowledge, he must certainly know what is to take place, as well as what has taken place. Besides, that he does know what the conduct of his creatures will be, is demonstrable from the fact that he has in so many instances foretold it. The following passage, among many others that might be quoted, shows beyond a doubt, that the conduct of the Jews in putting Christ to death was foretold, and consequently foreknown. "But ye denied the Holy One, and the Just," says Peter, "and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.—And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled." Now we have before us the fact, that God did foreknow that the Jews would crucify Christ. This fact, I say, proves that he had *determined* it. A little reflection will make this point plain to any one. It is a clear case, that nothing can be foreknown, until it is certain. It could not possibly have been foreknown that the Jews would crucify Christ, until it was certain that they would do this. When, therefore, God foretold this fact by the mouth of his prophets, he did it on the ground of its certainty. But what was there ages before these Jews were born that rendered it certain that when they should come into existence, they would crucify the Lord of glory? It could not be any thing in them, for as yet they had no existence. It could not be any information which God had received from any other being respecting their future characters, for no one in the universe was capable of giving him information. As "he is before all things, and by him all things consist," there is not, and there never was, any information upon any subject, which did not primarily come from him. But still there was something ages before these Jews existed—yea, ages before the world existed, or any creature, that rendered it certain that they would, when they should have a being and be favored with an opportunity, crucify the Son of God.

What was this ? What could it be ? To this I answer, it was the purpose of God. It could be nothing else. There was nothing else that could render the event certain. If we only suppose, that God from eternity designed to bring the Jews into existence, and that they should, when an opportunity presented, crucify the Messiah, we can see that there was, even from eternity, a ground of the certainty of this event. If God had *purposed* it, knowing himself, or his own purposes, he would know of course that they would do it, and could, on this ground, predict it. The fact, therefore, that God has foretold that the Jews would crucify Christ, proves incontestibly, that he had determined it. The same may be said with respect to every event which he has foretold. The prediction of it proves his foreknowledge of it. His foreknowledge of it proves its previous certainty. And its previous certainty proves it an object of his purpose or determination. On this ground we know that God determined the conduct of the Egyptians in oppressing the Israelites, the conduct of Pharaoh in refusing to let Israel go, the conduct of Sihon in coming out to fight against Israel, the conduct of Eli's sons in refusing to listen to their father's reproof, the conduct of Absalom in raising a rebellion against his father, the conduct of the king of Assyria in distressing Hezekiah and Jerusalem, the conduct of Nebuchadnezzar in destroying so many nations to gratify his ambition ; for all these things were foretold by the prophets. On the same ground we know that God determined the conduct of Solomon in building the temple, the conduct of John in preparing the way for the Messiah, the conduct of the Gentiles in receiving the testimony which the Jews rejected, the future conduct of the Jews when they shall embrace Christianity, the conduct of all nations in becoming righteous in the days of the millennium, and the conduct of the church in her attempts to bring about this glorious state of the world ; for the Bible is full of predictions on all these subjects, many of which are not yet fulfilled. But enough has been said to show that God has decreed the conduct of men.

This doctrine is now to be reconciled with their free moral agency. It was observed, as the reader will re-

collect, that if each of these doctrines could be shown to be true, this would prove that they are consistent with each other, on the principle that truth is always consistent with itself. It has been shown that the doctrine of decrees is true. A few considerations, it is believed, will make it as clearly appear that mankind are free moral agents. By a free moral agent, I mean a person who is capable of discerning between moral good and evil, who is voluntary in the right or wrong course he pursues, and who is praise or blameworthy, according as he obeys or disobeys the law of God. In this sense mankind are free moral agents. The following considerations will place this subject beyond all doubt in the mind of every one who is not bewildered by his own sophistry.

1. Every man *feels* that he is a moral agent. There is no one who is not conscious of perceiving the difference between right and wrong, who does not know that he is voluntary in what he does, whether it be in obedience or disobedience to the commands of God; and who does not feel remorse in the commission of what he knows to be sin, and an inward approbation when his conduct is such as appears to be right. There is no man that can divest himself of these feelings. Every one carries about in his own breast a monitor, which is secretly saying in accents which he may strive to silence, but cannot wholly disregard, "This is the way, walk ye in it." Although by continued transgression, the conscience may become seared as with a hot iron, and the sinner feel less pain in view of his transgressions than when first he entered upon his devious course, yet he can never be wholly unmindful of his sins, nor for any length of time be insensible to his danger. He may plead the decrees of God as an excuse for his crimes. He may deny his own moral agency. But after all, there is something within him that tells him he is free; that makes him feel that he is accountable; that points to the punishment which is due to sin, and makes him feel that he deserves to suffer it. Although the conduct of Judas in betraying Christ was decreed, although this had been told him before he was guilty of it, yet he was so conscious of his own moral agency in what he had done, that in an agony of remorse he exclaimed, "I have *sinned*, in that I have

betrayed the innocent blood ;” and in a paroxysm of despair, he went and hanged himself. Never was a man’s conduct more clearly foretold than that of Pharaoh ; and never was the *purpose* of God in any event more clearly revealed, than in his refusing to let the Israelites go ; yet all this time he *felt* himself a moral agent, was conscious of choosing the wrong while he knew the right, and obliged to admit the justice of his own punishment. “ God is righteous,” said he, while groaning under the heavy judgments of his hand, “ I and my people are wicked.” Similar to this is the confession of Joseph’s brethren, respecting their conduct in selling him as a slave in Egypt. Though according to the declaration of Joseph, he was sold and carried there agreeably to the agency and purpose of God, (“ God did send me before you to preserve life,”) yet when they were led solemnly to review this transaction, they were wholly unable to support their convictions of guilt, or to avoid the apprehension of deserved punishment. “ And they said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear : therefore is this distress come upon us.” I say, then, mankind all *feel* that they are moral agents. A consciousness of this is inseparable from their natures. They might as well deny that they exist, or that they feel pain or pleasure, as to deny that they are free moral agents.

2. Every man *treats* his *fellow creatures* as free moral agents. In all his intercourse with them, he proceeds upon the principle that they are able to perceive the difference between right and wrong, and are voluntary in the actions which they perform. He always takes it for granted too, that they are praiseworthy when they do right, and censurable when they do wrong. Whether a man believes in the doctrine of divine decrees or not, he always treats his fellow creatures as free moral agents. You never knew an individual excuse another for insulting or abusing him, on the ground that his actions were decreed, and that he was not a free agent. The most strenuous advocate for the decrees of God that has ever appeared, even the most consistent of those who have held that these were inconsistent with human liberty, has

never been known to set a thief at liberty, when he had stolen his goods, or to spare the life of a man who had murdered his family, on the ground that they were mere machines, and incapable of doing otherwise. I know there are some who pretend to believe in the decrees of God, and say also that they are inconsistent with the free agency of man; but even these reason with their fellow creatures, promise or threaten, reward or punish them, as occasion seems to require. They treat them in all respects as moral agents, while they affect to consider them as mere machines. This fact presents in the most striking light the overwhelming evidence, that mankind are free agents. The evidence of this is so clear, that no man, whatever may be his theory, is able to set it aside in practice.

3. Every man is treated as a free moral agent by *God*. The circumstance that God has given him a law, and required him to obey it, presupposes that he is a moral agent. All the exhortations, entreaties, promises and threatenings contained in the word of God, imply the truth that man, to whom they are addressed, is a free moral agent. All the rewards which God has dispensed to creatures, and all the judgments with which he has visited them, have been sent upon the principle that they are free moral agents. It is a fact, which ought not to be overlooked in this place, that God has treated all those persons, whose actions are known to have been decreed, as moral agents. He warned, admonished, and threatened Pharaoh, long after his decree respecting his conduct was made known to Moses. But all these warnings and expostulations were useless, upon the supposition, that Pharaoh was not a free moral agent. It is derogatory to the wisdom and goodness of God to suppose, that he would use with Pharaoh these means which were suited to operate only upon the mind of a moral agent, when he knew him to be but a mere machine. Besides, it is known that God visited Egypt with a series of the most dreadful plagues, and finally destroyed Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, as a judgment upon them for their wickedness in continuing to oppress his people, all of which must have been injustice, had they not been moral and accountable agents. Christ treated Judas as a

moral agent, both before and after he revealed the fact that he would betray him. A single sentence from the lips of our Lord upon this subject, is sufficient to show that his free moral agency remained, the decrees of God respecting his conduct notwithstanding. "And truly the Son of man goeth as it was *determined*; but wo unto that man by whom he is betrayed." It is impossible that Christ should have pronounced this wo upon Judas, if he had not been a moral agent. To suppose that he would, is to suppose that he might have been guilty of the most flagrant injustice. If there is any thing which can prove a man to be a moral agent, Christ's treatment of Judas in this declaration proves him to have been one. Equally true is it, that God treated the Jewish nation as free moral agents. It is well known, that for their sins in rejecting the Messiah, and imbruing their hands in his blood, their temple was demolished, their beloved city buried in ruins, and their civil and ecclesiastical polity destroyed. This was not the worst. A great proportion of the nation actually perished by the judgment of God with which they were visited, and the rest were scattered as bond-men and bond-women among the nations they abhorred. Now does not God's treatment of them in this instance place the subject of their moral agency beyond a question? Decreed we know their conduct was; for "of a truth, against thy holy child Jesus, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel *determined* before to be done." But after all, were they not free moral agents? Does not the treatment which they have received from the hand of God, speak a language on this subject which cannot be misunderstood? Is there any way to reconcile the judgments with which he has visited this people for their conduct toward Christ, with the hypothesis, that they were not free moral agents? If the manner in which he has treated them does not prove them to have been moral agents, it is utterly impossible for his conduct to speak an intelligible language, or for us to know in any case what he means, by what he says or does. There is on this supposition no such thing as demonstration in moral subjects, and all evidence of either the wisdom or the goodness of God is beyond our reach.

4. The moral *agency* of men is a subject of God's decree, as well as their actions. It is as easy to conceive, and it is as rational to believe, that God did decree they should act freely, as it is, that he decreed they should act at all. The Bible furnishes just as much evidence that God decreed the free moral agency of men, as it does that he decreed their actions; for in every instance in which they are represented as acting agreeably to a divine decree, they are also represented as acting with the most perfect freedom.

To gain as clear ideas of this subject as possible, let us for a moment lay aside the subject of decrees, and consider only the free moral agency of God's creatures. We believe, that man is made a free moral agent; that he does freely obey or freely disobey the commands of God; that he is worthy of approbation when he does right, and of punishment when he does wrong; that every man is freely pursuing a course in which he will obtain the favor or incur the displeasure of God. This, it is thought, is just what mankind believe they are doing. Now, I ask, where is the inconsistency in supposing that God from the beginning *determined* that they should act thus freely and accountably, in the very course which they are pursuing? Would his determining that they should act freely in this particular course, prevent their acting freely? Certainly not, unless his having decreed an event should take place, would prevent its taking place.

But let us give the subject a little more particularity. Those who deny the decrees of God, and make no account of them in their speculations upon the conduct of men, believe that the Jews *voluntarily* rejected Christ; that they rejected him when they had all necessary power to have received him; that they laid their hands upon him of their own accord, and without the least constraint or compulsion put him to death; and for this deliberate and wilful murder, they deserved the punishment which was inflicted upon them. This, it is believed, is really the manner in which they acted. And I ask, what difference will it make, as it respects their moral agency, if we suppose that God from the beginning *determined* they should so act. If God *determined* that they should reject Christ voluntarily, would this render them involuntary in the thing? If God determined that they should reject

him with all necessary power to receive him, would this decree destroy their power to receive him? If God determined that they should lay hands on him of their own accord, without the least constraint or compulsion, would this destroy their voluntariness, and lay them under constraint or compulsion? If God determined that they should put Christ to death with such feelings and motives as should render them justly deserving of punishment, would this take away all their guilt and render it unjust for him to punish them? To these inquiries, it is unnecessary to return a formal answer. If the decrees of God make sure what is decreed, it is certain that if their freedom was decreed as here supposed, they could not but enjoy it. So far in this case would the decrees of God be from destroying the free moral agency of creatures, that they would secure it. Now it is a fact, that the free agency of creatures is always as much a subject of his decrees as the actions themselves. This may not only be *supposed* to be the case in respect to the Jews: it actually was the case. The very passage which asserts the fact that their actions were decreed, asserts also the fact of their moral agency. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by *wicked hands* have crucified and slain."

And now, reader, is it not a plain matter of fact, that God has predetermined the actions of men, and that they are, notwithstanding, free moral agents? And on the principle that truth is always consistent with itself, is it not equally evident, that these doctrines are perfectly consistent with each other? Presuming that this is your conclusion, the writer feels disposed here to suggest a few considerations relative to this subject which may be of great practical utility.

Cherish, then, a firm belief in each of these doctrines, and never suffer your faith to be shaken by the sneers, reproaches, or charges of inconsistency which you may hear from others. The denial of either of these doctrines is never the result of a thorough investigation of the evidence in its favor; and the reproach which is so often heaped upon them is indicative of any thing rather than a fair and liberal mind. Whenever you hear them denied, or spoken of with lightness or contempt, do yourself the

justice to consider, that their revilers are either ignorant of what they affirm, or in heart opposed to the truth to which God has set his seal.

When you hear it said, "If God has decreed all events, then mankind are but machines, or that they are not blame or praiseworthy for their deeds, or that it is no matter what they do, or that all their guilt is to be charged upon God, know that they have drawn false conclusions from premises that are true, and involved themselves in the guilt of changing "the truth of God into a lie"—of "wresting the scriptures to their own destruction."

While you stand fast in the belief of these doctrines, be careful to let each have its own proper influence upon you. The belief of either of them will do you little good, unless their effects are felt in your hearts and seen in your lives. Let your belief in the doctrine of divine *purposes* impress more deeply upon your mind the truth, that God governs the world; that he is immutable in his holiness; and that he will bring light out of all that darkness, and good out of all that evil, which now alarm and distress you. Instead of pleading this doctrine as an excuse for the neglect of duty or indifference to the moral state of the world, as many presumptuously do, let it produce in you that confidence in God, and joy in the certain prospect of the fulfilment of all his promises, which will stimulate you to more constant and vigorous exertion in his service. Let your belief in the *free moral agency of man* remind you daily of your obligation, and accountability to God, and of the certainty and justice of that reward which awaits both the righteous and the wicked. Let it work in you a sincere and godly sorrow for all your past sins, a cordial acceptance of that Saviour through whose blood alone you can be forgiven, and a voluntary surrender of yourself to the service and disposal of Him in whom you live, and move, and have your being.

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THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

ILLUSTRATED AND ESTABLISHED.



WHATEVER may be our views concerning the doctrine of Election, in whatever perplexity and darkness it may to our minds be enveloped, or however strenuously we may deny it; it is involved in no such perplexity as is sometimes imagined. It is one of those important, plain, practical truths, which must be believed and loved.

In endeavoring to give as scriptural and intelligible view of this subject as I can, I propose

- To illustrate the doctrine;
- To evince the truth of it; and
- To vindicate it from objections.

I. I am to illustrate, or explain the doctrine of Election.

This is the more needful, because it is sometimes identified with things that are not true, and often confounded with things that are true, but which are foreign to the subject. Let it be observed, therefore,

1. *That it is no part of the doctrine of Election, that God created a part of mankind merely to damn them.* This is often said by those who wish to bring the doctrine into contempt. But it is not true. The ultimate object for which God created all men is the advancement of his own glory. He *will* punish multitudes of the human race "with everlasting destruction from his presence;" but he did not bring them into being merely *for the sake* of punishing them. "God is love." There is not one malevolent emotion rankling in his bosom. It is one of the foulest stains that was ever cast upon his spotless character, to admit the thought that he brought creatures into being merely for the purpose of making them forever miserable. *In itself*, he desires the salvation of every living man. We have his oath, "that he

has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." If he destroys the wicked, it is because their perdition is inseparable from the promotion of his own glory, and the highest good of his kingdom, and not because it is well pleasing to his benevolent mind, or the ultimate object of their creation.

2. *It is no part of the doctrine of Election, that Christ died exclusively for the Elect.* Such a representation is an unjustifiable perversion of the doctrine, and exposes it to unanswerable objections. Though there would have been no atonement but for God's design to save the elect, and though there could have been no designs of mercy toward the elect without an atonement; yet the doctrine of atonement and election are two distinct things. Much idle breath and illiberal crimination might have been spared, by giving them that place in the Christian system which they hold in the word of God. It has never yet been proved that Christ died exclusively for the elect. If language has any meaning, we are bound to believe that "he tasted death for every man." One would imagine that if the apostle had intended to put this question forever at rest, he could not have said more than he has in these memorable words: "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

3. *It is no part of the doctrine of Election, that the Elect will be saved let them do what they will.* The immutable law of the divine kingdom has made personal holiness essential to eternal life. It is not less certain that "no man will see the Lord without holiness," than that no man will see the Lord unless he be of the "election of grace." The elect cannot be saved unless they possess supreme love to God, sincere contrition for all their sins, and faith unfeigned in the Lord Jesus Christ. The elect can no more enter heaven without being prepared for it than the non-elect. If a man continues stupid and secure, if he never reads the scriptures, if he never attends upon the word and ordinances, if he is never anxious for the salvation of his soul, if he never repents and believes the gospel, if he never becomes the follower of the meek and lowly Jesus; he may rest assured there is nothing in the doctrine of election that

will save him. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

4. *It is no part of Election, that the non-elect will not be saved if they do as well as they can.* If they would "repent and believe the gospel," there is nothing in the doctrine of Election that would destroy them. If they would become reconciled to God, he would regard them with favor. If they would "come to Christ," they should "in no wise be cast out." (Let the non-elect do their duty, and they will be saved. Nay, let them possess one holy desire, and they will be saved. And if they will not do this, it does not become them to wrest the doctrine of Election and say, it is an essential part of it that, do what they will, they must be lost. Not one of the non-elect will be lost, unless he persist in impenitence, reject the offers of mercy to the last, and die in his sins.

5. *It is no part of the doctrine of Election, that the non-elect cannot comply with the terms of the gospel.* The efforts to vindicate the doctrine of election without separating it from this unscriptural notion, have not only proved futile, but done harm. There is but one thing that prevents the non-elect from accepting the offers of mercy, and that is their cherished enmity against God. We are well aware that the scriptures represent it to be impossible for men to do what they are unwilling to do. Hence says our Saviour, "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him." His idea doubtless is, that men cannot come to him, because they are unwilling to come; for he had just said, in the course of the same address, "And ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." He supposes that mere unwillingness renders it impossible for them to come. This mode of speaking not only runs through the Bible, but is agreeable to the plainest dictates of reason and common sense. All the inability of the non-elect therefore to comply with the terms of the gospel, arises from their unwillingness to comply. Their inability is of a moral, and not a physical nature. It is a criminal impotence. It consists in nothing but their own voluntary wickedness. While, therefore, it is proper to say, that men cannot do what they are unwilling to do, it is also proper to say, that they can do what they are willing to do. It is no

perversion of language to say, that a knave *can* be honest, or that a drunkard *can* be temperate; for every one knows that they could be, if they would. Hence it is no perversion to say, that a sinful man *can* become holy, or that the non-elect *can* comply with the terms of the gospel. Their unwillingness lays them under no *natural* inability, and may at any time be removed by their being willing. The non-elect are just as able to repent and believe the gospel as the elect, if they were but disposed to do so. They are as capable of doing right as of doing wrong. The doctrine of election leaves them in full possession of all their powers as moral agents, and all possible liberty to choose or refuse the offers of mercy. But for his voluntary wickedness, Judas was as able to accept the gospel as Paul. The non-elect are able to comply with the terms of the gospel, if they choose to do it. It is therefore their own choice, and not the decree of election, that shuts them out of the kingdom of heaven. All representations of the doctrine of election, therefore, that deny the non-elect *natural* power to comply with the overtures of mercy, form no part of that doctrine as it is exhibited in the Bible.

But if none of these things belong to the doctrine of election, what is it? For the sake of a clear understanding of the subject, several things must be particularly observed.

1. All mankind are by nature in a state of sin and condemnation. They are "estranged from the womb." The "imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." By the apostacy of their first parents, sin and the curse are the birth-right of all their natural descendants from generation to generation; so that by their offence, all their posterity come into the world with a corrupt nature, and under the wrath of God.

2. Notwithstanding the native corruption of the human heart, and the lost condition of all mankind by nature, God has provided a full and complete atonement for all their sins. The atonement was made, not for the elect or non-elect, as such, but all men as *sinner*s. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth on him, might not perish, but have everlasting life." The atonement of Christ is sufficient for all, adapted to all, offered to all, and irrespective of

the divine purpose as to its effectual application, made ■ much for one man as another.

3. Notwithstanding the unlimited provision of the gospel, all with one consent reject the overtures of mercy, and will not come unto Christ that they might have life. Left to himself, every individual of the human race will reject the Saviour and plunge to perdition. No sense of guilt and danger, no consciousness of obligation and duty, no pressure of motives will constrain a living man to lay down the arms of rebellion and be reconciled to God. If the Spirit of God does not appear in the glory of his grace to wrest the weapons of revolt from his hands and make the sinner willing in the day of his power, all are lost and Christ is dead in vain.

4. This sad result God has determined to prevent. He does not mean that all mankind shall finally perish. He does not intend that they shall rob him of his glory, nor his Son of the reward of his death. Some he saves. There is a *part* he rescues from themselves and from perdition. This number is *definite*. His eye is upon them. When in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity, he sends his Spirit to convince them of their lost condition, to show them their need of mercy, to make his word quick and powerful, to create them anew in Christ Jesus, and to make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He begins, carries on, and completes the work, and receives them at last to "the glory which is to be revealed."

5. God does this *from design*. Who are saved and who lost, is not with him a matter of indifference. He has not committed the destiny of souls to the obscure omnipotency of chance. He *formed a purpose* to renew, and sanctify, and justify, and glorify a certain part of our fallen race. He formed this purpose from eternity. This design is an eternal design, this determination an eternal, irrevocable decree.

6. In doing this, it is important to remark, that God is governed by a wise regard to his own good pleasure. He does not sanctify and save one part of mankind rather than another, because one part is better than another. The elect are no more worthy of being made the objects of regenerating and redeeming grace, than the non-elect.

When the design of saving them was formed, they were not in being, and "had done neither good nor evil." During the whole of their unregenerate state, they were opposing God and contemning the Son of his love. The moment before their regeneration, they were his determined enemies. It could not therefore, have been from regard to any thing in them, that *they* were taken and *others* left, but from a regard to the mere good pleasure of God. It was a *sovereign* purpose. It was that all the glory might redound to God's great and holy name.

7. Nor is it less important to subjoin, that this sovereign and eternal purpose was formed in view of the atonement of Christ. In its practical influence it regarded men as already fallen by their iniquity, and beyond the possibility of deliverance except by atonement. When God determined to save a part of mankind, he had it in prospect to provide such an expiation for the sins of the world, as to justify him in the unlimited offer of pardon, and in the full and complete justification of all who accept it. He owed it to himself, in forming the purpose to save, to devise a consistent method of salvation. It would have been a violation of the rights of moral government, to have received rebels into favor "without the shedding of blood." Hence the elect are said to be "chosen in Christ." In other places they are said to be "Christ's seed." In others they are represented as "given to him" by his Father. When in the covenant of peace, he engaged to lay down his life for the sins of the world, a stipulated number was "given him" as his reward. In view of mankind as already plunged in guilt and ruin, and of Christ as making an adequate atonement, God "chose them to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth."

This is what we suppose the scriptures mean by the doctrine of election. The apostle represents himself and the Christians at Ephesus to be "chosen"—"chosen in Christ"—"chosen in him before the foundation of the world;" and that, not upon condition they *would be* holy, nor because of any foreseen holiness; but "that they *should be* holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated them unto the adoption of children

by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

With this illustration of the doctrine, we pass,

II. To show that it is true.

We think the truth of this doctrine may be evinced,

1. From the divine immutability.

God is unchangeable. "He is of one mind, and none can turn him." But if God is unchangeable, then every thing that has been, or will be, was unalterably fixed and determined in the divine mind from eternity. Hence it is written, "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." Hence God himself claims this exalted character: "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, the things that are not yet done; saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." If we could suppose the Deity to be wiser, and better, and mightier at some times than at others, we might suppose, that with every accession of knowledge, goodness and power, he would form some new design. But he is always the same. And as his character never alters, so his purposes never alter. Hence the divine immutability secures the doctrine of election. If the divine mind has formed any new purpose with regard to the salvation of men, then he has altered his plans, and is mutable; but if he has always been of the same mind, then unless he actually saves the whole, he must have formed the purpose of saving a certain part. Every individual he saves, he must have "always meant to save," he must have always chosen and determined to save. But this is nothing more nor less than the doctrine of election. All the objections, therefore, that are made against the doctrine of election, are levelled equally against the divine immutability.

2. The doctrine of election may be conclusively argued from the divine foreknowledge.

The mere light of nature is enough to teach us, that God knows all things present, past, and to come. It is impossible that a being of infinite wisdom, should commence a system of operations, without knowing what he is about to do. If God does not know all events before

they actually take place, then his knowledge may increase, and he may be wiser to-morrow than he is to-day. In short, if he does not foreknow all things, he may not only from day to day, discover things that are new, but he may deduce new results from them, may misjudge in his arrangements, and be frustrated in his purposes. But the Bible puts this question beyond a doubt. "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world." It is a settled point, then, that God knew from all eternity, every thing that would take place.

God, therefore, *knows* who will at last be saved. In the ages of eternity, he beheld the long track of time from the fall of Adam to the general judgment, and fixed his eye on every individual of the human family, that would at last enter into his kingdom. He knew the *exact number*, and he knew with absolute certainty. I say, he knew *with certainty*; for there is nothing else that deserves the name of *knowledge*, except that which is certain. God did not know how many, and who would *probably* be saved, but how many would *certainly* be saved. Absolutely to foreknow a mere contingency, is impossible. To know who might be saved, and who might not be saved, is to know nothing about it. Certainly to know that a thing *will be*, and yet certainly to know that it *may not be*, is the same thing as certainly to know, and not certainly to know at the same time; which is palpable contradiction. It must be conceded, therefore, that God must have known with *absolute certainty*, the exact number of those who would be saved. But how could this be known, unless it were a determined event? If it were undetermined, it was uncertain; and if uncertain, it could not certainly be known. Let any man but an Atheist, look at this with an unprejudiced mind, and he must receive the doctrine of election. How could God know from eternity, how many would be saved, unless he had from eternity determined to save precisely this number? In eternity, there was no being but God himself. There were no heavens and no earth; no angels and no men. God existed alone. And when he existed alone, he *certainly knew* how many intelligent beings would exist, and how many would be saved. But where did he obtain this knowledge? Not from any other being beside

himself, for there was no other ; and not from himself, unless he had formed the determination to save them ; for if he had not formed the determination to save them, he could not have known that they would be saved. It is just as certain therefore, that God *determined* from eternity who would be saved, as that he *knew* from eternity who would be saved. “ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate.” But this is nothing more nor less than the doctrine of election. All the objections which lie against the doctrine of election, lie with equal force against the divine prescience.

3. In proof of this doctrine, we shall make our appeal to the holy scriptures.

We consider the doctrine unanswerably demonstrated from the preceding considerations ; but “ to the law and the testimony.” We receive the scriptures as the word of God, and the infallible rule of faith and practice. Here then we have a standard to which every thing must bow. From this oracle, there is no appeal. Let us go then to the Bible ; and let us go—not to alter, not to expunge, not to supply, not to wrest from its plain and obvious meaning a single word ; but simply to inquire, what the Lord hath spoken, and to yield our preconceived opinions to the paramount authority of eternal truth. Here, if we are not deceived, you will find the doctrine of election revealed as plainly as language can reveal it.

Before we extend this investigation, let me beg you to read with care the words of the apostle, in Ephes. i. 3, 4, and 5 : “ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love ; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”—“ According as God hath *chosen* us in Christ ;” and as though this were equivocal, he adds, “ according as he hath *chosen* us in him *before the foundation of the world ;*” and to give emphasis to the sentiment, he subjoins, “ having *predestinated* us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of *his will.*” Is not this the doctrine of election ?

Turn to the eleventh verse of the same chapter: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being *predestinated* according to the *purpose* of him who worketh all things after the *counsel of his own will*." Does this bear no resemblance to the decree of election?

The same thought you will also find in that noble challenge of the apostle, toward the close of the eighth of Romans. Paul had hopes of an elevated character. He "knew that all things worked together for good to them that love God." And how did he know this? He looked through the miseries and the darkness of time, to the counsels of eternity. "And we know," saith he, "that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to *his purpose*. For whom he did *foreknow*, he also did *predestinate* to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did *predestinate*, them he also *called*; and whom he *called*, them he also *justified*; and whom he *justified*, them he also *glorified*. What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of *God's elect*?" How characteristic of this noble apostle to say, in the opening of this epistle, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ!"—and how delightful to hear him thus glorying in electing grace!

In the ninth chapter of the same epistle there is a remarkable passage, which, with all their efforts, the opposers of this doctrine have found it hard to pervert or misunderstand. The apostle's affection for his countrymen had led him to see with grief, that "all are not Israel which are of Israel," and in this lamented fact, to acknowledge that the destinies of men were in the hands of a sovereign God. He saw sovereignty every where. He could not tell why Ishmael might not have been as fit a subject of the promise as Isaac. Both were the seed of Abraham, and yet it was the pleasure of God to fix his love on Isaac. Hence it is written, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."—"And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, (for the children *being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil*, that the *purpose* of God according to *election* might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,) it

was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger, as it is written, *Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*" Think of this.

In the second epistle to Timothy, the first chapter, and the ninth verse, we have this unequivocal declaration: "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own *purpose and grace*, which was given us in Christ Jesus *before the world began.*" And in the second epistle to the Thessalonians, the second chapter and thirteenth verse, we have this declaration: "God hath *from the beginning, chosen* you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." If there is any import in language, these passages of scripture expressly assert the doctrine of personal, unconditional election to holiness and eternal life.

Though all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and alike entitled to our confidence, yet it is desirable to throw together the thoughts of our Saviour on this interesting subject. There is no doctrine which he more frequently enforced, and in which he more greatly rejoiced, than the doctrine of election. It was a common observation with him, that "many are called, but few are chosen." (Matt. xx. 16, and xxii. 14.) He told his disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but *I have chosen you*, and *ordained* you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." (John xv. 16.) The same sentiment he inculcated in his reproof to the mother of Zebedee's children: "To sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them *for whom it is prepared* of my Father." (Matt. xx. 23.) Again he says, alluding to the promise of the everlasting covenant, "All that the Father *hath given me*, shall come to me." (John vi. 37.) In the tenth chapter of the same evangelist, he likewise speaks of his elect with peculiar tenderness. He calls them his flock, his "sheep," for whom he pre-eminently laid down his life. "My *sheep* hear my voice, and I *know* them, and I give unto *them* eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, that *gave them me*, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." In the same chapter he told the Jews,

"Ye believe not, *because ye are not of my sheep.*" In his prayer in the garden, he prayed for the elect, and for them only. These are his words: "I pray for *them*; I pray not for the world, but for them which *thou hast given me.*" (John xvii. 9.) Christ also speaks of the impossibility of "deceiving the *elect*"—of "shortening the days of tribulation for the *elect's* sake," and of God's avenging "his own *elect.*" (Mark xiii. 22, Matt. xxiv. 22, and Luke xviii. 7.) Such declarations do not need any comment, and we believe they do not admit any evasion. You may pervert and disbelieve them, but they are the words of Christ, and not one of them shall pass away. Future scenes shall reveal their unchanging verity, in signals hung out from the rending earth and the blackened heavens. The day is on the wing, when you shall "see the Son of man coming in the clouds, with power and great glory." The voice of the archangel will then proclaim the doctrine of election. "Then shall the Son of man send his angels, and shall gather together *his elect* from the four winds." (Mark xiii. 27.) And when gathered before him, what will he say? What will he say—He will preach the doctrine of election to an assembled universe, as though "seven thunders uttered their voices." Turning to those on his right hand, he will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom *prepared for you*, from the *foundation of the world!*" The top-stone of the christian temple will then be brought forth with the shoutings of electing grace.

But it is needless to multiply testimony: I have often been surprised, that men who profess to receive the Bible as the rule of their faith, should question the truth of this doctrine. It must be either, that they do not read the Bible; or, that they pervert its plain and obvious import; or that they feel at liberty to deny what God has expressly revealed. I should feel myself acting by far the more consistent part to disavow the truth of revealed religion, than to avow it and deny the doctrine of election. Search the scriptures, and remember that no truth, however unpleasant, if found there, is to be treated with indifference and disrespect. You are bound to believe what is true. The claim of God upon your faith is as imperative as his claim upon your practice. You have no more right to

disbelieve the doctrines of the gospel, than to neglect its duties. Both are crime ; both are rebellion. If you have difficulties in viewing this subject, be willing to sit at the feet of Jesus and "learn of him." Submit your all to the decisions of his Holy Spirit. But we pass,

III. To vindicate the doctrine from all reasonable objections.

Objection 1. Why did God determine in the purposes of his grace, to make one man differ from another ? Why did he not determine to save all ?

Answer. It is easy to inform you : "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight !"

Obj. 2. But if I am not one of the elect, what is there for me to do ?

Ans. Your duty, or abide the consequences.

Obj. 3. But if I am not one of the elect, how am I to be blamed for not being saved ?

Ans. Because you do not choose life, when life and death are with equal sincerity set before you. You are bound to be saved. It never was your duty to be lost. I know it is certain you will persist in sin and perish, if God does not stop you, and if he has not from eternity determined to stop you. But are you not to be blamed for your invincible perseverance in iniquity ? If it is certain that a man will commit the crime of murder, if God has not from eternity determined to prevent him, is he not to be blamed for committing it ?

Obj. 4. But if I am not elected, how *can* I choose life ?

Ans. Just as easily as you can choose death. Your rational and moral faculties capacitate and oblige you to choose life. The doctrine of election does not infringe upon your moral agency. It leaves you in full possession of all possible liberty to accept, or reject the Saviour.

Obj. 5. But if the doctrine of election be true, God cannot be sincere in the offers of mercy. How is it compatible with the sincerity of the calls and invitations of the gospel to all men, that he should have determined to make only a part accept them ?

Ans. Beyond all question, the calls and invitations of the gospel are made to all. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." No sinner has the warrant to exclude himself from this gracious overture. The

invitations of mercy are addressed to all alike, and with as much sincerity to each one, as though *he* were the only sinner in the world. But to obviate this objection conclusively, it will be well to consider, *What is necessary to constitute a sincere invitation?* We reply,

1. That the blessing offered *be in actual existence, and at the disposal of the offerer.* If a man invite me to a banquet which is not in being, and which he has not ability to provide; every honest mind will pronounce the invitation insincere.

2. That the offerer *be willing his offer should be accepted.* If a man invite me to a banquet, and I ascertain that he does not wish me to accept the invitation; I should consider the invitation insincere.

3. That the invitation be made *upon practicable terms.* Should you invite me to a banquet, upon condition that I first pluck the Sun from his orbit; I should consider you insincere. And

4. That the offerer *be willing to impart* what he offers to all who will accept it. If you invite me to a banquet, and I accept your invitation, but am refused a seat at your table; I should be justified in considering the invitation insincere.

We submit to the objector, whether in any case where these four things combine, there be not a sincere invitation. Abstract from an invitation either of these properties, and I acknowledge it is insincere. But nothing is more true, than that the invitations of the gospel combine all these properties.

Pardon and eternal life are in actual existence, and at the disposal of a sovereign God. Christ died for the non-elect as well as for the elect, and therefore God *has mercy to offer* to them as well as the elect. If the atonement had done nothing for the non-elect, so that they are precisely in the situation they would have been if no atonement had been made, then there is no sincerity in announcing to *them* the overtures of mercy. If there is no salvation provided for them, so that God offers what he had not to bestow, then his offers are insincere. But salvation is provided. "All things are ready." "There is bread enough and to spare."

God is willing the invitations of his grace should be

accepted. He is willing every man should come. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn and live." Nor is there any dishonesty in these professions. If he were unwilling the non-elect should accept the offers of life, or if he did any thing independently of their own voluntary agency to prevent their accepting it, there might be. But it is not so. He never did, he never will do any thing to prevent a sinner's accepting the Saviour, if he is willing to accept him.

God has also made the offers of mercy upon terms that are practicable and reasonable. If he had not, the charge of insincerity would remain unanswered. All that is required on the part of those to whom the invitations of the gospel are addressed, is a right disposition of heart, or in other words, a disposition to make the invitations of the gospel welcome. There is nothing in the way of accepting the offer, but a perverse will.

In connexion with this, God is willing to bestow mercy on all who will accept it. He has said, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Nor has there been an instance in which this declaration has proved untrue. So long, therefore, as God has mercy to bestow—so long as he is willing to bestow it—so long as he is willing it should be accepted—so long as he offers it upon reasonable terms, and actually imparts it in every instance where it is not perseveringly rejected; it cannot be said, that he is insincere in the offers of mercy. The sincerity of his offer does not depend upon the perverseness which rejects it.

Obj. 5. The doctrine of election represents God as being *partial* in the dispensations of his grace; and the scriptures declare that "there is no respect of persons with God."

Ans. That God is *discriminating* in the dispensations of grace, is most cheerfully allowed. He doubtless does more for the elect than for the non-elect. He makes them willing in the day of his power; he renews and sanctifies them; he matures them for the glory which shall be revealed; he finally advances them to heaven. This he designed to do for them from all eternity, while none of this he does for the non-elect. But though he is

thus discriminating, he is not *partial*. *Partiality* is a *capricious* preference of one before another; and if it could be proved that the favor which God exercises toward the elect were the result of *mere caprice*, he would be chargeable with criminal partiality. Partiality is a disposition to favor one before another *without reason*; and if it could be proved that God has no reason for the eternal difference he makes between the elect and the non-elect, he would be chargeable with partiality. Partiality is an undue respect *to the persons* of men; and if it could be proved, that in the method of grace, God regards the elect rather than the non-elect, from an undue respect *to them*, or *their persons*, he could not be acquitted of the charge of partiality. God is not partial, because his sovereignty is neither arbitrary, nor capricious, but in all its diversified operations, under the guidance of unerring wisdom and infinite goodness. God is not partial, because, as the moral governor of the world, he uniformly treats men according to their real character and conduct. He does not, through any "respect of the persons of men in judgment," or through the unguarded influence of any private partialities, condemn and punish the righteous, nor approve and reward the wicked. When I see the sovereign of the universe regard the prayers and alms of the devout Cornelius, a Roman centurion, with equal complacency as though he had been a Jew, I can repeat the sentiment of Peter: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Obj. 6. The doctrine of election represents God as unjust.

Ans. It will not be pretended, that he is unjust to the elect. If there be injustice, it is toward the non-elect: and if he is unjust to the non-elect, it must be that *he treats them worse than they deserve*. But how does he treat them? He casts them out into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And is this worse than they deserve? Is not this the just desert of every child of Adam? How then can God be accused of injustice, if in his great mercy by Jesus Christ, he is pleased to save a part of the human family, while he pun-

ashes the other part in proportion to their deserts? If he would not be unjust in punishing the *whole*, surely he would not be unjust in punishing a *part*.—But, perhaps, I ought to blush for attempting to answer an objection so full of impiety, as to call in question the justice of God in the dispensations of his grace. I would rather repeat the answer of the apostle, “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!” This is enough to cover the objector with shame. “Who art thou, O man! that *repliest against God!*”

Obj. 7. If the doctrine of election be true, why can I not as well live in carelessness and sin, as in a punctual attendance upon the means of grace, and the duties of religion? I cannot alter God’s eternal decree. To this I

Ans. You *can* live in carelessness and sin; you can cast off fear and restrain prayer; you can grieve the Holy Spirit and reject the Saviour—and you can perish! If you choose to leave your eternal salvation to the decree of God, without personal religion on your part, and without any efforts to obtain it, you will, beyond all question, die in sin and sink down to hell. If God has chosen you to salvation, *through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*, does it follow that you will be saved, if you always *reject the truth*, and *never become holy*? Because God determined to save Noah by means of the ark, does this prove that the ark was not necessary, or that Noah would have been saved without it? Or might he have sat down with the scoffing world, and resolved not to be at the trouble of building an ark, because God had determined to save him and his family from the flood?—God never determined the end without determining the means necessary to obtain it. If the objector expects that there is any decree of election that will save him without his own personal holiness, he will find his expectation sadly defeated at last.

Obj. 8. If the non-elect, left to themselves, will never accept of salvation, and if God has not determined to make them willing to accept it, why are they exhorted to repent and believe?

Ans. Because they are sinners, and it is reasonable they should repent, whether elect or non-elect. Because there is a Saviour provided for them, and it is reasonable

they should believe on him. Because, they are able to do both. The doctrine of election does not take away a single power, does not infringe upon a single privilege, does not diminish the force of a single obligation. But more than this ; though they never will yield the controversy with God, and though God has not determined to make them yield ; yet all the exhortations to duty with which they are favored, answer a most important purpose. They illustrate the obduracy of their hearts, and prepare them to see, and acknowledge, and feel the justice of God, in their final condemnation. When they see themselves sinking into the pit, they will remember that they were once urged to believe and live ; and they and an assembled universe will forever feel, that the justice of God shines *brighter* by all the calls of his mercy.

Obj. 9. But the doctrine is calculated to drive men to despair.

Ans. It might be calculated to drive men to despair, if there were any other way by which sinners are reconciled to God. But so long as it is true, that unless God bow the stubborn heart of man, by the efficacious and almighty energy of his own grace, and unless he always meant to do this, every living man must perish ; we cannot see how the fact, that there is a part of mankind for whom he does this, and for whom he eternally designed to do it, should drive sinners to despair. No, the doctrine of election takes away all false hopes, and no others. It strips the sinner of all his self-righteousness ; it disrobes him of all his vain pretences ; it drags him out from all his hiding places, and throws him into the hands of a sovereign God ; but it takes away no solid foundation of hope. But *whom* does the doctrine of election drive to despair ? The people of God ? Pious parents ? Faithful ministers ? They would all be in despair without it. When cut off from every other hope, they can look up to God's unchangeable purpose to save, and there hang with comfort and delight. I ask again, *whom* does it drive to despair ? Convinced and distressed sinners ? It is upon this truth the desponding sinner throws himself in the last resort. He sees that if discriminating mercy does not raise him from the pit, he forever sinks. He feels that he must put his life in his hand, and cast

himself at the footstool of sovereignty, pouring out this sum of all his hopes, "Lord, if thou *wilt*, thou *canst* make me clean!" No, the doctrine of election drives none to despair; throws none into discouragement, but the incorrigible enemies of God.

Still, some may object after all, that the doctrine of election is full of perplexity, needless and unprofitable, and ought not to be preached.

To this I answer, it is one of the plainest doctrines in all the Bible. It is simply *God's determining to save whom he will, and making his own choice from among this lost world, according to his sovereign pleasure.* Surely there is no perplexity in this. But if it *were* a perplexing truth, this would be a reason for preaching, rather than not preaching it. Sometimes the minds of sinners, and young converts, and older saints, are embarrassed by difficulties of their own creating, when contemplating this doctrine. And one reason why they are so, is because the doctrine is not frequently enough brought into view. When this truth is plainly and fully exhibited, it delights and nourishes the people of God. It is the sincere milk of the word: and both young and older Christians always feel uneasy, and restless, and unstable, till they are informed and established in this important doctrine of the gospel.

If the objector still thinks that this is a very *unprofitable* doctrine, we have to make one inquiry. Is it contained in the Bible? If it is, we beg the permission to refer the objector to that unequivocal declaration of the Holy Spirit: "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, and for instruction in righteousness.*" Observe, it is not "*all scripture*" *except the doctrine of election*; but "*all scripture*"—is "*profitable.*" The same reasons exist for preaching this doctrine, and for viewing it profitable, that there were for revealing it.

But it is more tedious than difficult, to follow the objector through all his windings, and expose his ever-varying expedients to shake off the obligation to yield an implicit assent to this great and blessed truth. Some of the more common objections we have attempted to obviate. After all, there is a class of objections that will remain unobviated. They are the objections, not of the

head, but of the heart. It is easy to prove that God is a sovereign, but we cannot make wicked men submit to his sovereignty. It is easy to demonstrate the doctrine of election, but it is not in man to make the wicked love it. It is important, therefore, that we make a suitable application of the whole subject. And,

1. From the view we have taken of our subject, we cannot fail to discover some of the reasons why the doctrine of election is so much and so violently opposed.—With multitudes, the very reason why they are hostile to it, is *because they understand it*. They see how it affects their interests for time and eternity. They see how it throws them into the hands of that God who “hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” It is because they see it in a light that disturbs their sins and their hopes, that they hate it, and oppose it when it is preached. This was the case when it was preached by our Saviour. On one occasion, when he preached it with great clearness and power, very many of those who had for a considerable time followed him, “went back and walked no more with him.” On another occasion, when he preached it in the synagogue at Nazareth, his hearers were so exasperated, that they made a bold and desperate attempt upon his life. This is the secret spring of disaffection to the doctrine; *wicked men do not love the sovereignty of God*; they murmur, and repine, and contend, because they are in his hands, as the clay in the hands of the potter, and because it depends on his mere good pleasure, whether they shall choose life or death; whether they shall go to heaven or hell. They cannot bear to submit to a sovereignty that is so absolute. They are not willing that the destinies of eternity should be in the hands of God. They wish to be above God. They wish him to alter his purposes respecting the salvation of men; and they are dissatisfied, because they cannot dethrone him; because they cannot hinder his working all things after the counsel of his own will, and because they know his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. It is not, therefore, because the doctrine of election is not true, that wicked men oppose it, but because it gives them no peace till they are reconciled to God. It is because it arrays the holy God against them, and gives a death-blow to all their selfish

desires and selfish hopes. The same disposition that hates the law and the gospel, that hates God and rejects his Son, that loves sin and hates holiness ; opposes the doctrine of election.

2. We are taught by our subject, that the opposition which is made to the doctrine of election, is exceedingly sinful. It is always sinful to oppose the truth as it is in Jesus. And the sinfulness of that opposition rises in proportion to the malignity of the opposition, and the importance of the truth against which it is directed. But there is no truth that is opposed with greater bitterness by the carnal mind, than the truth we have now set before you. Sometimes the wicked feel when they hear it, as the murderers of Stephen felt, when they gnashed upon him with their teeth. What is this but the *very spirit of the damned* ? Against what is all this hostility directed ? Against a truth that gives the fullest and clearest view of the divine glory. Against that eternal purpose, to which must be traced the gift of a Saviour—the descent of the Holy Ghost—the offer of mercy—the existence of the church, and the happiness of heaven. No, not a drop of mercy would have ever fallen upon our desolate world, but for electing love. It is owing to this blessed and eternal purpose, that you are now out of hell. That you enjoy a day of grace, and the means of salvation, is owing to God's eternal purpose to rescue from perdition, a part of our fallen race. Not a soul would have been spared from the desolations of the fall ; not a sinner would have been converted and saved ; not a ransomed rebel brought home to glory ; not a note of the everlasting song have vibrated on the ear ; but for the eternal purpose of God to save his people. And yet, it is against this fundamental, this glorious truth, that all the enmity of the selfish mind is set in array. It is against this glorious truth—that gives ministers all their encouragement to preach, Christians all their encouragement to pray, and sinners all their encouragement to repent and believe the gospel, that the seed of the serpent spit out all their venom. O, what would become of our world, if those who hate the doctrine of election could gain the object of their wishes, and blot this day-star of hope from the sacred page ! Well might we “ cry to the rocks and

the mountains to fall upon us, and cover us from the wrath of him that sitteth on the throne." Who is prepared to bear the guilt of thus tearing away the last hope of a ruined world! O sinner, it is the hidden opposition of that rebellious heart to this precious truth, that thus levels the fatal blow! It is not for the want of an inclination to strike the doctrine of election out of being, that you *have not done it*, and thus defeated the purposes of redeeming mercy, and bathed heaven in tears. *Are you this side eternity?* We may add,

3. The doctrine of election ought to be loved.

God loves it. He takes infinite delight in contemplating the designs of eternal mercy. Christ loves it. There was an hour when his soul broke out in high expressions of joy, while contemplating this truth in the days of his incarnation: "At that time Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." The Holy Ghost loves it. With ineffable delight does he enter our world, as the great agent to carry on the designs of electing grace. All holy beings love it; and *all* beings, whether sinful or holy, *ought* to love it. They have no reason for hating it, but every possible reason for loving it.

If they are bound to love God, they are bound to love the doctrine of election. This doctrine, more than any other in the gospel method of salvation, brings God into view. He formed the purpose of saving the elect, because this was the method in which he could manifest all his perfections in the clearest, fullest manner, and in a manner calculated to awaken the attention of the universe, and fix it upon his great and amiable character. That character is perfect. Every thing that can render a being lovely and adorable, worthy of commendation and confidence, belongs to God without the shadow of imperfection in kind or degree. There are some faint resemblances of excellence in creatures; but they are the mere rays scattered from the fulness of his glory. When from this atom world, I look up, and look around me, and look every where, and every where behold the living Deity, I see perfection combined with perfection, perfection illus-

trating and beautifying perfection, and cannot but feel that it is infinitely desirable that this matchless excellence should be made to appear. Every truth that illustrates it, claims my highest regard. Not to delight in the truth that illustrates it, is not to delight in God. Not to feel my obligation to love the truth that illustrates it, is not to feel my obligation to love him.

If all are bound to love what is best, they are bound to love the doctrine of election. God is infinitely wise and good, and both knows and will do what is on the whole wisest and best. As his wisdom enables him clearly to see what number and what persons it is best to save, so his goodness disposes him to desire and elect the very number and the very persons. In the designs of a perfectly wise and benevolent being, there can be nothing that is unlovely, but every thing that is lovely. God does not call upon his creatures to approve his purposes, merely because they are *his*; but because they are best. He has formed no purpose merely because he *will* form it; but because it is best. He does nothing merely because he *can* do it; but because it is best. In the holy sovereignty of the King of kings, there is no tyranny—no oppression—no injustice—no wanton exercise of power—no impulse of passion; but every design and every event is the result of one eternal impulse to what is best. The great plan of the divine operations is as good as it can be. It is because the eye and heart of God are fixed on the best possible results, that he is a God of electing love. This is the key to all that is inscrutable in the mystery of election. This is the thought that binds every creature in the universe to “be still and know that he is God.”

Yes, beloved reader, the doctrine of election ought to be loved. You must not only believe, but *love* it. If you see its discriminating influence in these effusions of the Holy Spirit, you must see and adore. God is in all. “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another to dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted

to destruction? And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared to glory!" The rights of the Creator are merely nominal, unless uncontrolled. If God may not "do what he will with his own," no matter how soon he abandons the supremacy of the universe. Impenitent men! you must bow to this holy dominion. What do you hope to gain by your opposition to discriminating grace? Unfriendly as these unhumbled hearts may be to its searching influence, this hostility must cease. This doctrine *must be loved*. To hate it, is to take the side of the wicked against the righteous. To hate it, is to take the side of the adversary against God. To hate it, is to take the side of hell against heaven. To hate it, is to be forever miserable.

Do you say, "*I would love it, if I were one of the elect?*" Has it then come to this? What if you are not one of the elect? Have you a right to hate it? Have you a right to hate God for not arresting you in your own *chosen* way? Have you a right to hate God, because in the final recompense, he treats you as you deserve? Have you a right to hate God for saving *others*, merely because he does not save *you*? "Is thine eye evil, because he is good?" Do you cherish affections so selfish and malignant, that you can rejoice in no felicity incompatible with your own? Because *you* are not saved, would you have a world of sinners perish? Because you will "wail and gnash your teeth," will you murmur that you cannot hear the myriads of the redeemed mingling their sighs and moans with yours? Because you will sink to hell, will you complain that you cannot behold the throne of God sinking by the side of you? O sinner! Where are you? What spirit is this? And what is this spirit fit for, but fuel for the unquenchable flame?

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OF THE

CHRISTIAN HOPE.



NOTHING is more common among men than the hope of salvation. Some cherish this hope from one consideration, and some from another. It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that their hopes will lead to different consequences. An apostle thus describes the hope of a real Christian and its results. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God : therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God ; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." 1 John, iii. 1, 2, 3. The design of this Tract is,

To consider some of the false hopes of mankind.

To describe the hope of a real Christian ; and

To show that the hope of a real Christian leads to sanctification.

The false hopes of mankind are various.

Some hope to be saved, merely from the consideration, that Christ died to make an atonement for sin.

There are few who do not indulge some kind of expectation of a future well-being. But if you ask the reason of such expectation, they will tell you it is by Christ. They have some indistinct idea that they are sinners, and of course some sense of their need of a Saviour ; and hope, they can hardly tell why, that Christ will save them. They read that he died for sinners, and though they have no realizing sense of their guilt, or of what is necessary in order to salvation ; yet, in some way or other, they believe that Christ will save them from hell, and make them forever happy.

Some hope to be saved, because they have done more good than evil.

They acknowledge that they have often transgressed the law of God, but then they think they have often obeyed it; and are extremely unwilling to be convinced, that God is under no obligation to reward them for the supposed good they have done. They have clothed the naked, fed the hungry, visited the sick, attended public worship, supported religious institutions, often prayed, and have been very serious in religion; and are by no means so bad as some others. One has been very prudent in his habits, and is more deserving of favor than the profligate. Another is less guilty than the drunkard, and the drunkard has never committed theft, and the thief has never been guilty of murder. Thus every sinner can easily find some one worse than himself, and in himself some good things, on account of which he hopes to be rewarded. It is perfectly natural for men to compare themselves with others that are worse than they; to place their selfish morality in the scale with their open vices; and so to conclude it will be well with them, because they have done more good, than evil.

There are others that feel secure on the ground that *all* will be saved.

The Scriptures intimate, that this fatal delusion would be propagated as the basis of hope. "Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life." In the present age of abounding wickedness, this doctrine has obtained more credit than in any former age; and we have reason to believe, that, absurd and contrary to Scripture as it is, it will spread, and that multitudes will go down to hell, with this lie in their right hand.

Others hope to be saved, because in some former period they imagine themselves to have been converted.

Where the gospel is faithfully preached, most acknowledge a change of heart to be indispensable to salvation. The greater part, who have arrived to adult age, have been, in a greater or less degree, convinced of their character and state. And it seems as if almost all had

hopes of having passed from death unto life. They have been distressed in some past period, and some change has taken place in their minds, which they call conversion. They are conscious that there was an alteration in their feelings; that they had great distress, succeeded by great comfort; and though they have felt little or nothing of the kind since, they are unwilling to relinquish the hope, that their hearts were then changed. On this hope they have lived ever since. There are many Christians of this sort. Their hopes possess no purifying influence; and serve only to keep them in a kind of death-like stupor, and to quiet them in their way to the pit.

There is another way in which people often attain a hope of their good estate; which has more of the appearance of religion, and is often attended with more lasting effects. I mean a hope, founded on the mere counterfeit of the Christian graces. There are many, the process of whose supposed conversion is somewhat like the following. They are first awakened up to see that they are sinners, and are greatly distressed with apprehensions of the wrath of God. They are fully convinced that they must perish unless some arm interpose to save them. In this distressful hour, when they see themselves, as it were, suspended over the pit of endless destruction, they have a view of Christ dying upon the cross for them in particular, and they feel instant relief. All their distress is gone, and they appear to be in a new world. They are immediately filled with love to God, and wonder at their former opposition. Now they think they are born again. A great change has taken place in their feelings;—but why? Because they suppose their state is different. Once they viewed God as their enemy; now he is their friend. Once they saw no way of relief, but the expectation was, that they must perish forever; but now they see that Christ died to save them in particular, and they can say, 'Heaven is mine, Christ is my Saviour, he has pardoned all my sins, and purchased eternal life for me.' Now it is easy to see that this religious experience may all arise from mere selfishness. It may exist, without the least degree of holy love to God, or repentance, or faith, or submission. The love which they feel for God, and their joy, arise from the belief that he loves

them, and that their personal interest is safe. As this experience is founded in selfishness, so one realizing view of the true character of God, of his holy law, and of their condition as condemned sinners, destroys it all. The moment the delusion is dissipated, their hearts rise in rebellion. And hence we find, that those who settle down on such a religion as this, are the most confirmed enemies to the truth. These are some of the ways in which sinners deceive themselves, and bring ruin on their souls.

I pass to describe the hope of a real Christian.

His hope is ordinarily preceded by a conviction that he is a totally selfish creature, full of opposition to the true character of God, under the condemning sentence of his holy law, and deserving of the endless torments of hell. The real Christian has seen so much of his heart, as to know, that he is naturally possessed of that spirit of selfishness, which would destroy God and all his creatures, were this possible, to make himself happy. And he knows that he hated those truths by which God makes himself known; especially his sovereignty, his immutable decrees, his election of some to holiness and life, and his reprobation of others to sin and death. In view of these truths he felt at times dreadful heart-risings. He knew that it was reasonable that he should give himself into the hand of his Creator, to be disposed of as he pleased, but every feeling of his heart was against it. Now he feels differently.

1. *Towards God.* He sees infinite moral beauty in God himself. He now loves those very things in God, on account of which he once hated and opposed him, especially his sovereignty. He not only sees it to be reasonable, that God should dispose of all things according to his good pleasure, but this attribute appears, especially at times, peculiarly sweet to him. There is such a fulness of power, wisdom, justice, goodness, truth, and faithfulness in God, that his whole soul is swallowed up in a sweet sense of his glory. Now these feelings did not arise from the apprehension that his sins were pardoned, and that he should be saved: for when he first felt his heart drawn out in love to God, and desires after him, he had no hope, and perhaps, not a thought about

himself, whether he should be saved or not. Self ~~was~~ lost, and all personal considerations were, for a time, wholly out of sight. God was the object of his love, admiration, and praise; and it seemed as if the whole universe must unite with him in adoring such a Being.

2. *Towards himself.* When his attention turns upon his own character, it appears odious to him. That he ever hated God, trampled on his law, and resisted his authority, are considerations that sink him into the deepest contrition. He loathes his sinful character; most heartily condemns the part which he has acted, and justifies God in condemning him. The more he contemplates his own character, and the enormity of his guilt, the more he is willing to sink, and to vindicate the law of God, in both its precept and penalty. It is the moral glory of God that has attached such a dreadful character to sin, and excited such deep self-abasement. He knows he shall not be injured, even if sent to hell, and God appears just as good in destroying as in saving. There appears to be perfect safety in being in the hand of God, and if he had a thousand souls, he would leave it with him to dispose of them as would be most for his glory.

3. *Towards Christ.* When he views the Lord Jesus Christ, his heart is drawn out in love to him. In his mediatorial character, as it is now presented to his mind, he sees infinite loveliness. As it respects himself, he feels ill deserving, and if saved at all, it is his desire to be saved by sovereign grace, and in a way by which God will be forever glorified, and the creature abased. He sees just such a way as this revealed in the gospel; a way honorable to the divine law, that supports justice, condemns sin, and secures the divine character in the bestowment of pardon, and his heart falls in with it. It appears transcendently glorious to his view. The more he contemplates the divine excellences of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the scheme of saving grace through his atoning blood, the more he is filled with wonder and with praise.

These are some of the feelings of the true penitent when he is first "brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light;" his feelings in view of the different objects that are presented before him. And when he re-

flects on what has passed in his mind, and compares his feelings with what the word of God requires, and with what others who give evidence of a saving change of heart have felt ; he is ready to conclude that he is a subject of the renewing grace of God, and ventures to hope he shall be saved. He does it with trembling ; and generally, it is probable, has more or less doubts as to his sincerity. He finds in his heart so little love to God, and Christ, and the truth, that he is, at times, cut off from all hope : still, on the whole, he cherishes the belief that he is interested in the salvation of the gospel ; and on the promise of a faithful God, he relies for strength to overcome the temptations of Satan and the world ; and that he shall finally be received into the uninterrupted enjoyment of God, whom having not seen he loves, and in whom believing he rejoices, at times, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

It remains to be shown, That the hope of a true Christian leads to sanctification.

The hope of a true Christian will lead him to aspire after greater degrees of love to God, and enjoyment in him. There is a natural beauty in the divine perfections, and in the system of divine truth, that may attract the curiosity of impenitent sinners, and afford them a kind of satisfaction. But true Christians see the moral glory of God, which the wicked, as such, never can see. "God hath shined in their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." He has given them a benevolent heart, and in this way, a spiritual discovery of his glory. Says the apostle, "God is love : and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." It is in this way that Christians come to an experimental knowledge of God ; and the more they see of him the more they love him. Hence said the Psalmist, whose hope was well founded, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning ; I say, more than they that watch for the morning." Those who have ever had a view of the moral glory of God, can never rest satisfied with their present attainments in the knowledge, love, and enjoyment of him. They love to meditate upon his

perfections ; and as they grow in the knowledge of God, so they grow in divine love, and press forward after clearer discoveries of his glory. It was in this way that the apostle Paul was weaned from the world, and “ in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ ;” where he could see more of his glory, love him better, and enjoy him without interruption.

The Christian’s hope leads him to desire deliverance from sin.

The Christian hates sin because it is against God, a violation of his holy law. His deepest abhorrence of sin is when he has the clearest discovery of the divine glory. Hence said Job, “ I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear : but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” The more a Christian loves God, the more he will hate sin, and the more will he desire deliverance from it as the deadliest evil. Under a load of sin and death, he at times, groans being burdened, and ardently longs to be freed from it. Full well he knows the bitterness of transgression. With what fervor does David pray to be delivered from sin ; and with what abhorrence does he speak of it. “ Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions ; and my sin is ever before me. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” But you will ask, do not professing Christians sin ? those who give the most evidence of religion ? Yes. And they are willing to confess before God and the world that they sin. And they are prepared in their hearts to justify that law which threatens sin with everlasting destruction. They can say, we will love God, though he execute this law upon us. At times they are overwhelmed in a view of their sins, committed in violation of the holy commands of God.

The Christian’s hope leads him to increasing discoveries of the riches of divine grace, in the plan of salvation.

The work of redemption is a subject into which the angels desire to look, and on which they meditate with increasing astonishment. The more a Christian sees his own wretchedness, the more will he adore the rich grace of God displayed in the gospel. God, in Christ, recon-

ciling the world unto himself, and making sinners the partakers of his own moral likeness and blessedness, is a subject on which he loves to meditate. And when he has a clear view of it, as he sometimes has, he is ready to say with the apostle, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" The more he contemplates the work of redemption, the more he loves to contemplate it, and the more he is filled with praise and astonishment. It is a subject that has a powerful effect on his mind, and operates as a strong dissuasive from sin.

Through the influence of the hope that is in him, the Christian is led highly to esteem the word of God. He looks upon the Scriptures as containing the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Here he comes to the most intimate acquaintance with the perfections and will of God. Here he finds his own character and wretched condition as a sinner clearly pointed out. Here he finds the way of deliverance from sin and hell, and the perfect rules of life. The Scriptures are, to the Christian, full of instruction. They are a light shining in a dark place. There is no treasure he so highly values. He listens to the Bible as the voice of God. It appears a reality. Considered as a history of God and his Providence, and as containing rules of duty to the universe, nothing can equal its worth. And he is ready to say with the Psalmist, "Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it."

The system of truth contained in the Scriptures, is as really nourishing to his soul, as food is to his body. He loves the truth for the same reason that he loves God. When he feels as he ought, and as he does sometimes feel, the truth affords him a sweet satisfaction. He loves to realize that there is a God of infinite perfection. And from the complacency which he feels in him, he is led to rejoice that he has formed a plan of operation, embracing all things from everlasting to everlasting. He is assured that God knows what is best to be done, and that under his government the greatest ultimate good will be secured. And it is from his love to God, he rejoices that he has created, preserves, and governs all things with a view to his own glory. The moment a person sees the moral

glory of God, he finds reason to rejoice in the doctrine of divine decrees and government, in its utmost extent. The supremacy of God has always been a subject of delightful contemplation to Christians. It is the foundation of their peace, and absolutely essential to it. And the clearer discoveries they have of the universal government of God, the higher their joy rises. Hence the Psalmist, when favored with a special view of God as the sovereign disposer of all things, breaks out in the following strain, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice."

The election of some of mankind to holiness and eternal life, is a source of joy to Christians. They are not pleased with this truth principally on account of a personal interest in it. It is as precious with respect to others as to themselves. They rejoice that it is consistent for God to save some, that he has revealed this purpose; and they feel willing that he should save just whom he pleases. They are satisfied with the purpose of reprobation, from the consideration that it is not for the glory of God to save all. Their submission to this doctrine does not arise from a supposed personal exemption. They would be satisfied with it, had they not the least hope of pardon. The doctrine appears just as good with application to themselves, as to others. There is nothing selfish in the foundation of a Christian's hope. It rests on the consciousness that he does love God, hate sin, and delight in the way of salvation, as revealed in the gospel. The love which Christians feel to the truths of God's word, is an expression of their love to him. Hence the more they see of the truth, the more they see him, and are filled with joy. It is only through the truth that they know God, and are conformed to his moral image. Hence Christ, in one of his last interviews with his disciples, made this affectionate prayer to the Father for them, "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth." It is by believing, loving, and practising the truth, that Christians give evidence of the sanctifying operations of the Holy Ghost upon their hearts.

A Christian's hope will make him prayerful.

The more a Christian sees God, the more he feels and loves to feel his entire dependence upon him: and the more he becomes acquainted with his own heart, the

more he sees his need of help from God, to overcome the temptations, and escape the dangers to which he is exposed. This help he obtains by prayer. God usually makes his children see their need of help, and disposes them to ask it, before he grants them favor. It is impossible for a Christian to maintain spiritual life without prayer. He who gives the world evidence that he lives without prayer, tells them that he has no religion. A prayerless Christian is an absurdity. Just in proportion as a person hates sin, will he feel desirous that God, on whom he feels wholly dependent, would deliver him from it. Christians at times feel inexpressibly strong desires to promote the spiritual good of their fellow creatures. And how do they hope to benefit them? They know that they cannot awaken them to one serious thought, to one holy resolution; but they realize that God is able to turn their hearts; and they look to him for help. As Christians grow in grace, and approach the end of their journey, they grow in prayerfulness. It is by communion with God in humble persevering desires of the soul, that they testify to those around them the purifying influence of their hope.

The hope of a real Christian will lead to a due observance of all instituted duties; to a life devoted to God.

It was not without design that Christ instituted a church, and enjoined it on all who possess his spirit, to make a public profession of their love to him, by joining themselves to his church, and partaking of the holy supper which he appointed, in commemoration of his death. The positive duties which the gospel enjoins, are as really binding on men as moral duties; and no Christian can feel justified in the neglect of them. Said Christ, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." There was a beautiful representation given of Christian character, when it was said of Zachariah and Elizabeth, "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." None, who hope they are Christians, have the least excuse for neglecting instituted duties. And those who love God, will desire no excuse. It will be a privilege, as well as duty, to walk in all the statutes of the Lord. They have chosen the law of God to be the guide of their

lives. Prompted by supreme love to him whom they have chosen for their portion, they are ready to make any personal sacrifice, that his honor, or the prosperity of his cause may require. Such are the fruits of a Christian's hope.

From the preceding remarks we are led to conclude, that the number of real Christians is comparatively small.

Every real Christian has been created in Christ Jesus unto good works; and these are his evidence of having passed from death unto life. In every age of the church there have been some of this description. In the early days of the world, we find Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Daniel, the three Jews, with many others, whose hope rested on solid evidence. And in no period has God left himself without witnesses of the power of his grace. But in every age, the great mass of mankind have manifested a different spirit. They have not sought the glory of their Creator, submitted to his will, regarded his institutions, believed the truths of his word, or devoted themselves to his cause: but they have possessed a spirit of selfishness, which has led them to oppose his authority, to hate his character, to trample on his commands, to neglect his cause, and even to combine their efforts to root out the remembrance of his name from the earth. If we are to consider those only as Christians, who appear to be actuated by a single eye to the glory of God, to hate sin, to love the Lord Jesus Christ, his institutions, his doctrines, and to devote themselves to the promotion of his cause, then the number of real Christians must be very small.

From this subject, it also appears exceedingly important that mankind should understand the peculiar doctrines of the gospel.

It deeply concerns every candidate for immortality to know what spirit he is of; whether he is interested in the favor of God, or under the curse of his law. God commands men to determine this important question. But how can they determine this without a knowledge of the truth? How can they know what their feelings towards God are, unless they understand his true character? If mankind are under the most solemn obligation

to love God, to obey his law, and to embrace the gospel ; then it is highly important that they should clearly understand the truth, since it is by this only that they can obtain a right knowledge of God, of Christ, and of their duty. Those who do not understand the truths of the gospel, must be, in a great measure, ignorant of themselves ; and of course it is impossible for them to have a hope, accompanied by proper evidence, of having passed from death unto life.

Finally ; all who hope they are the subjects of divine grace, are bound to try themselves in the light of truth.

To be given up to a false hope, is of all situations the most dangerous. Such are shielded against conviction. The threatenings of the word of God do not alarm them. But such as have settled down on a false hope, though they may feel secure, have more reason to be alarmed than those who have no hope. Very few have given up their hope in this world. Where a person first finds rest, he usually remains through life. Hence, it is of vast importance that we examine our hearts, and not be deceived. "He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The hope of a real Christian, leads to sanctification. But do the hopes of mankind generally, possess a purifying influence ? There are many, we have reason to believe, who hope they are Christians against evidence, hope in the midst of a general neglect of duty. But of what avail is a hope that has no purifying influence ? that leaves its possessor a selfish, prayerless, impenitent enemy to God ? Every false hope shall perish, when God taketh away the soul. O how much to be deplored is the state of that man, who thinks he is ripening for heaven, when he is ripening for hell ! Whose dreams of safety shall last only till death, and who, instead of ascending to glory, shall descend into the regions of endless mourning !

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THE
PERSONALITY AND OFFICES
OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT.



IN the work of redemption God makes the fullest manifestation of himself. In this divine work the united glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, shines with the greatest brightness. It enables us to contemplate distinctly the Three, who unitedly are the One Jehovah, the God of salvation. To the DIVINE THREE, peculiar offices are respectively ascribed, the accomplishment of which constitutes the great work of redemption. This work is ONE. It corresponds with the mode of the Divine Existence, which comprises three Persons existing in perfect unity of being and design. In this Tract it is proposed to exhibit some of the testimonies which the Holy Spirit has given in the sacred Scriptures respecting his own Personality and Office.

I. The Scriptures afford abundant proof of the Personality of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they teach that he is a personal Agent, in the same sense that the Father is a personal Agent, or that the Son is a personal Agent.

In exhibiting some of the proofs which the Scriptures afford that he is such an Agent, I begin with the benediction which concludes the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." In this form of blessing, which is implicitly a prayer, while it is evident that Christ is named as an Agent distinct from the Father, it is equally evident that the Holy Spirit is named as an Agent distinct from either.

In Christ's commission to his disciples, just before his ascension, he says, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Matt. xxviii. 19. Here are the same Three to be always acknowledged distinctly in the administration of the sacred ordinance of baptism. The Son is to be acknowledged in distinction from the Father, and the Holy Ghost in distinction from both the Father and the Son. It is therefore plainly implied, that as the Father is an Agent, and the Son an Agent, so also is the Holy Ghost. Speaking of the united participation of believing Jews and believing Gentiles in the blessings of the gospel, the apostle says, "For through him [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." Eph. ii. 18. The same distinction implying three Agents, is here brought to view.

There is another class of texts which more directly assert the Personality of the Holy Spirit—those which ascribe personal agency to him. If a being who acts, is an agent; and if one who acts voluntarily and understandingly, is a Personal Agent, it will appear from the texts which follow, that the Holy Spirit is such an Agent. Our Saviour told his disciples, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John xiv. 26. "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me." John xv. 26. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." John xvi. 7, 8. In these divine declarations, the Holy Spirit is expressly said to perform the agency of teaching, reminding, testifying, reproof. As an intelligent Agent he is *sent* to perform these acts: He *proceeds* from him who sends him: He *comes* and accomplishes the agency assigned to him. What can be plainer than the exhibition which is here made of the Holy Spirit's Personality?

In the passages referred to in the margin,* we read of his speaking through the apostles; revealing; teaching; bearing witness; separating men to the apostleship; sending them forth to preach; signifying his pleasure respecting particular acts of the apostles; forbidding them to preach in certain places; appointing overseers to the church; inspiring the ancient prophets; effecting the renovation of the heart; conferring gifts on men; giving efficacy to the preaching of the gospel; leading Christ; giving spiritual life; dictating to the apostles; searching the deep things of God; strengthening the servants of God with might; speaking to the churches; being grieved, &c. Can these operations be ascribed to any other than an intelligent, voluntary Agent? And does not the fact that they are ascribed to the Holy Spirit, prove that he is such an Agent? If all these instances are to be resolved into the bold figure of personification, is it not without a parallel in all the sacred writings, even the most poetical, and much more the prosaic?

The Holy Spirit is an adorable Agent, a Person in the Holy Trinity, possessing attributes equal with those of the Father and the Son. It is true, that he is sent by the Father, and the Son; that he receives from the Son and communicates to men. Christ promised his disciples, "I will send him unto you;" and he said, "He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." John xvi. 7 and 14. But this does not imply any inferiority in his nature or attributes. It only shows that in the Divine operations by the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, there is an official order. That no inequality exists between them, is evident, since the work which is ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption, is no less that of divine efficiency, than what is ascribed to the Father, or the Son. It is no less an exertion of omnipotence to renew, than to create; no less an exhibition of divine goodness and grace to sanctify, than to atone.

* Mark xiii. 11. Luke ii. 26; xii. 12. Acts v. 32; xiii. 2; xiii. 4; xv. 28; xvi. 6; xx. 28; xxviii. 25. Tit. iii. 5; Heb. ii. 4. 1 Pet. i. 12. Matt. iv. 1. John vi. 63. Acts ii. 4. 1 Cor. ii. 10. Eph. iii. 16. Rev. ii. 7. Eph. iv. 30.

The Holy Spirit is by those who are inspired by him expressly called God. When Ananias had been guilty of attempting to deceive the apostles respecting the price of his possession, Peter said, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." Acts v. 3, 4. Spiritual teaching, convicting men of sin, renewing the heart, sanctifying the affections, producing holy love, repentance, faith, and all the Christian graces, are called the operations of God, and are ascribed to God. But the same operations and effects are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is, according to the Scriptures, truly God.

Both the Personality and Divinity of the Holy Spirit are clearly proved by what our Saviour says of the peculiar heinousness of the sin of blasphemy against him. "Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." Mark iii. 28, 29. In these words, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is represented as distinct from all other kinds of blasphemy. They teach that men may blaspheme the Father, and that they may blaspheme the Son, and yet, on the terms of the gospel, be forgiven; but that if they blaspheme the Holy Ghost, they cannot be forgiven. Consequently, the Holy Ghost is not a mere influence or attribute of the Father, or of the Son; for if he were, to blaspheme that influence or attribute, would be the same thing as to blaspheme the Father or the Son. But a distinction is here made by our Saviour between that blasphemy which is against the Holy Ghost, and all other kinds *wherewith soever* they shall blaspheme. Since, therefore, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is distinct from that against the Father, or the Son, the Holy Ghost is distinct from either of the other adorable Persons in the Trinity; and being One against whom men are liable to commit blasphemy, this distinction implies personal, or voluntary and intelligent agency.

This declaration of our Saviour proves also the Divinity of the Holy Spirit ; for why should that blasphemy which is committed against him be forgiven “ neither in this world, neither in the world to come,” Matt. xii. 32, while all other kinds of blasphemy may be forgiven, if supreme majesty and glory do not belong to the Holy Spirit ?

But while the Scriptures plainly teach, that the Father is a Divine Person, and that the Son is a Divine Person, and that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person ; they as plainly teach, that these THREE are ONE GOD. That there is no contradiction or absurdity in this, is evident, because the Scriptures do not teach that they are Three in the same sense that they are One ; but that there is such a *distinction* between them, that personal agency may be ascribed to each ; and such a *union*, that they are the ONE ONLY GOD. This distinction and union do indeed involve a mystery ; but it is a mystery which is essential to all our hopes in reference to eternity. This will appear evident by considering

II. The peculiar Offices of the Holy Spirit. The offices which he sustains are connected with those of the Father and of the Son in the work of redemption. The peculiar offices of the Son are to make an atonement by taking upon himself our nature, and offering up himself a sacrifice for sin ; to make intercession for those who come unto God by him ; to hold the keys of death and hell, and maintain a mediatorial government over the church, and all things in heaven and earth pertaining to its interests. The Spirit is given to him without measure ; which implies that the attributes of the Holy Spirit are employed in accomplishing the redemption which the Lord Jesus as mediator has undertaken. The agency which the Holy Spirit performs in redemption, pertains to his peculiar offices.

That state of mind in which the impenitent are when they are sensible of their sinfulness, guilt, and danger, is effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Christ promised his disciples, “ If I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” John xvi. 7, 8.

The renovation of the heart is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. “ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee,

except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the kingdom of God." John iii. 5. The apostle says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Titus iii. 5.

The Holy Spirit having produced conviction, and conversion, carries on the work of grace in the heart, till the redemption of the soul unto God is completed. The love of God is shed abroad in the hearts of believers by the Holy Ghost: Rom. v. 5. They abound in hope by his power: Rom. xv. 13. The graces by which they are distinguished,—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, are the fruits of the Spirit: Gal. v. 22, 23.

It was by revelation made by the Holy Spirit, that all the prophecies, the divine precepts, admonitions, promises, and all the truths recorded in the sacred Scriptures were given. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Peter i. 21. He dictated by special revelation all they wrote. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." 2 Tim. iii. 16.

Miraculous gifts with which the apostles and others were endowed to prove the divine origin of the gospel, were conferred by the Holy Spirit. This the apostle very explicitly declares: "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." 1 Cor. xii. 8—11.

Thus it appears, that in the divine work of redemption in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit participate according to their respective offices, it is the Office of the Holy Spirit to reveal divine truth to the world; to confer the gifts of miracles; and by means of revelation to reclaim men from sin and death by convicting, converting, and sanctifying them. The revelation of truth is completed; the prophecies and other evidences of the

divine origin of the Holy Scriptures are now sufficient without miracles; and consequently miracles have ceased. But there is still need of divine influence to render the gospel effectual to the salvation of sinners; and, accordingly, this part of the divine agency pertaining to the offices of the Holy Spirit still continues, and will be carried forward, till the redemption of all God's chosen people is completed.

The reader is now called upon seriously to reflect on what has been exhibited from the word of God respecting the Personality and Offices of the Holy Spirit. You cannot but regard it as a subject preëminently sacred and important. You cannot but feel that the manifestation of Jehovah which is ascribed to the Holy Spirit claims your solemn attention. Accordingly a few remarks to aid your reflections on this subject, and to assist you in making a profitable use of it, are subjoined. May the Holy Spirit accompany them with his enlightening and sanctifying grace!

1. If the Holy Spirit performs the agency which has been ascribed to him, we may expect to see evidences of his operations. We have not, however, reason to expect that these evidences will be seen in every place, and amongst all men. It is ordinarily by the instrumentality of appointed means, especially the truths of the gospel, that the Holy Spirit effects the conviction and conversion of sinners. It is not to be expected, therefore, that the peculiar agency of the Holy Spirit will be manifested in those places where the truths of the gospel are not made known. Nor is it to be expected that *all* persons will be subjects of the saving influence of the Holy Spirit in those places where the truths of the gospel *are* made known. God has not told us that it is his purpose to render the truth effectual to the salvation of all to whom it shall be communicated. We read that some will be subjects of "all deceivableness of unrighteousness, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved;" "and for this cause," it is added, "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. It is also written, that "unto them

which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed." 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8. But it is a revealed purpose of God, that many shall be saved by means of the truth; and this affords us reason to expect, that where God in his providence sends his truth, there are some whom he has "ordained to eternal life;" and that there, evidences of the agency of the Holy Spirit in the conviction and conversion of sinners will be seen. Has not this been the fact in every age and in innumerable places, since the first promulgation of the gospel? The official agency of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the event of the conversion of three thousand in one place, and on one day, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. It is manifested in the fact, that the gospel was propagated with great rapidity, that churches were planted among many nations, and that the number of believers multiplied daily, in the time of the apostles, notwithstanding that the truths which they preached were hateful to the natural hearts of men, and themselves were constantly liable to persecution for the truth's sake. The same agency is manifested in the preservation of the church during succeeding ages,—in the reformation in the day of Luther and Calvin, and in all the revivals of pure religion, and in all the instances of the conversion of sinners unto God down to the present time. When Christians who have left their first love, are excited to new obedience, fervent prayer, and holy zeal; when sinners who have been hardened and careless, are awakened, and convicted of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; when convicted sinners become humble, submissive, and obedient,—all who witness these effects have reason to acknowledge them the visible tokens of the Holy Spirit's special presence. The careless sinner may see evidence of the Holy Spirit's agency, if he will look at the difference between those who are anxiously inquiring what they shall do to be saved, and himself. The convicted sinner has still more evidence of it, because he experiences its effects in himself, and sees it in the difference between himself and the sinner who by the grace of the

Spirit is reconciled to God, and is rejoicing in hope. But most of all, those who have been brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and with whose spirit the Holy Ghost bears witness that they are the children of God, have reason to testify with gratitude and praise, that they know the reality of the work of the Spirit.

2. Correct views of the offices of the Holy Spirit are adapted to make Christians feel that they are entirely dependent on him for the prosperity of Zion. They ought not to expect that their own hearts will be sanctified, and that their minds will be enlightened with the knowledge of the truth; or that the church will be preserved from errors and apostacies, except by the special influence of the Spirit of grace. They ought to be sensible, that for the conviction and conversion of sinners, they are dependent on his influence. They ought to regard every thing else which appears to have a tendency to promote the prosperity of Zion, as being merely instrumental. The Holy Scriptures, the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the ordinances, and all the means of divine appointment, have no efficacy in themselves to produce the sanctification of Christians, or the conversion of sinners. "So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." All the divinely appointed means, had they been employed in the most able, persevering, and faithful manner, from the fall of man to the end of the world, unaccompanied by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, would not have availed to the conversion of one sinner unto God. The hearts of sinners being averse to the light, and enmity against God, they will not become reconciled by any moral suasion; but will refuse to submit, till they are made willing by the power of the Holy Ghost. Let this truth have its appropriate, practical influence on every Christian's mind. It will lead to prayer. It will prepare the heart to receive the blessings of the Holy Spirit, and to give him glory to whom it is due.

3. The agency of the Holy Spirit claims the highest gratitude of the people of God. What are all other blessings without this? Though health, riches, peace, and liberty are possessed in the highest degree; though the

Sabbath, the sanctuary, the gospel, and all the means of salvation are enjoyed ; yet that the scenes of life may be truly joyous, something more is necessary. Notwithstanding all these things, there is an overspreading gloom, and a fearful foreboding. Nothing can dispel this gloom, avert the tokens of approaching wrath, and light up the scenes of life with joy and hope, but the illuminating, renewing, purifying, and saving influence of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, let the scenes of life be ever so adverse to the desires of the worldly man, if amid the deprivations and afflictions which are endured, the peculiar blessings of the Holy Spirit are bestowed, the Christian experiences the highest gratification of his heart's desire. What divine work is so sublime in its nature, or so happy in its results, as that, not of giving existence to immortal beings, and enduing them with all the capacities of a rational mind, but of reclaiming such beings from the lapsed state of the rebellious and lost, and preparing them for the peace and joys of heaven ! That Christian has lost his discernment of the excellence of spiritual realities, and his heart is devoid of the spirit of Christ, who can see evidences of the descent of the blessings of the Holy Spirit, and not lift up the voice of praise, or feel the glow of gratitude.

4. Christians ought to beware lest they grieve the Holy Spirit, and deprive themselves and others of the blessing of his gracious operations. They are liable to do this, else there would not have been occasion for the divine caution, "Grieve not the Spirit." Does it not then behoove every Christian to consider in what way he is liable to commit this evil, and to endeavor above all things to avoid it ? If, when a work of divine grace has begun in any place, a spirit of party, and of controversy on unessential points, is cherished, it has a direct tendency to divert the attention from subjects of the greatest moment, and to counteract the operations of the Divine Sanctifier. Let Christians beware of indulging such a spirit, and let awakened sinners beware of those who manifest it.

Christians are liable to grieve the Holy Spirit, by neglecting to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. The peculiar doctrines of the gospel are never so offensive to sinners, as when their

attention is awakened, and their hearts remain unreconciled to God. While they are in this state, they see that these doctrines destroy all their false hopes, and that an entire change must take place in their hearts, or their state must be that of eternal despair. They will, therefore, if possible, disbelieve the doctrines of the gospel, and embrace some fatal error adapted to quiet their consciences, and allay their fears. If, while sinners are in this state, those who profess to be Christians appear to be indifferent to those divine truths which try the hearts of men, and especially if they oppose them, they encourage the wicked to resist the means which the Holy Spirit blesses to the conversion of the impenitent. Let Christians beware of siding with the opposers of the truth, lest they grieve the Holy Spirit.

Not only in defending the truth, but in other ways, Christians are required to be co-workers with God. When they see indications of the operation of the Holy Spirit on the minds of sinners, they are not to think that their own obligations are discharged, and that labor and prayer are no longer necessary. At such a time their desires should be more ardent, their faith increased, their prayers more fervent, importunate, and persevering. It is the time of spiritual harvest—of the ingathering of souls; and it calls for special exertion, and unwearied effort. But if, at such a time, Christians neglect their duty, refuse to come up to the help of the Lord, and remain at ease in Zion, they grieve the Holy Spirit, and do more to stay the progress of his work, and to deprive souls of the blessings of his grace, than it is possible for all the open and avowed enemies of religion to do.

5. The Holy Spirit is worthy of supreme honor and adoration. The sacred writings abound in adorations and honors to this Person in the adorable Trinity. These adorations and honors consist in ascribing to him the sublimest of the divine works,—that almighty agency by which the kingdom of grace and glory is maintained and advanced. It is almost impossible to open the writings of the apostles, and not find divine, sanctifying, and saving agency ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The church is taught to depend entirely on him for all needed grace, to the end of time. No duty therefore is plainer, than that

of rendering divine honors to the Holy Spirit. If it may be seen why it is a sin of peculiar aggravation to blaspheme the Holy Ghost, it may as easily be seen that it is a duty peculiarly sacred to honor him. To pay divine honors to the Holy Spirit, is a duty which the experience of every Christian naturally dictates. To whom does the Christian ascribe the grace which awakened him from his death-like slumbers, and showed him his sins and danger? To whom does he feel indebted, that he was made willing to accede to the terms of the gospel, and that he was led to seek for peace at the throne of mercy? By whom is he reclaimed from his frequent backslidings, and kept through faith unto salvation? Does not the experience of the Christian testify, and does not his heart answer, with holy adoration and gratitude, that his benefactor is the Holy Spirit? Let *them* refuse to adore him who are willing to be deprived of his grace. Let *them* deny that divine honors are his due, who tremble not at the thought of being left a prey to the delusions of an unsanctified heart.

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NO. 11.

THINGS SECRET,

AND

THINGS REVEALED.

As man is limited in his intellectual powers, it is evident that his inquiries should be circumscribed within certain limits. While he confines his researches within proper bounds, he may not merely get notions, but arrive at certain knowledge. But, when influenced by an ill-regulated curiosity to push his inquiries beyond proper limits, he wanders in gloomy regions of doubt and conjecture. He has no principles to conduct him to any conclusions in which he can repose the least confidence. In every department of science, much time has been lost, and distinguished talents have been misemployed in consequence of not attending to the line which should limit the extent of human investigations. By not observing that line, men, eminently qualified to promote the cause of science, have been disappointed and chagrined, because they could not attain to a knowledge of subjects which do not come within the compass of human power, and have been induced to draw the philosophical conclusion, that it is impossible to arrive at certain knowledge on any subject whatever. And that conclusion has fastened them down in complete skepticism. In no department of knowledge is it more important to distinguish between subjects which do, and subjects which do not, come within the reach of our capacities, than in that of theology. In this department, some people are so fearful that they shall examine into subjects which lie beyond their province, that they neglect those which are plainly revealed, and of which they are capable of acquiring a satisfactory knowledge; while others, neglecting plain and practical subjects, direct their inquiries to those on which revelation is entirely silent, and to a knowledge of which they can never attain. The first of these two classes must be criminally ignorant of fundamental doctrines of revealed religion, and greatly exposed to fall into erroneous and

dangerous practices. The other class are not only ignorant of the principal doctrines of revelation, but, in consequence of not arriving at those attainments to which they aspire, are in great danger of relinquishing all religious research, and considering the whole revealed system as a cunningly devised fable, or a gross imposition on the human understanding. Such errors ought to be avoided; and they may be avoided by distinguishing, and observing the distinction, between those things which are secret, and belong to God, and those things which are revealed, and belong to man. It may not be improper, in this Tract, to show what may be considered as secret, and what as revealed, in relation to some of the principal doctrines contained in the Holy Scriptures.

The doctrine which asserts the existence and perfections of God, claims our first attention. This doctrine lies at the foundation of all true religion, both natural and revealed. It is not, therefore, peculiar to the system taught in the Scriptures. But, as it is contained in the system, and is absolutely essential to it, it must now be brought into notice. That there is a God, possessed of every possible perfection, natural and moral, is a truth which presses upon the mind on the first reflection. It is revealed so clearly in the works of creation and in the volume of inspired truth, that we cannot deny it, without resisting the most convincing evidence, and violating the principles of reason and common sense. But, though it is clearly revealed that this great and perfect Being exists, yet there are many things which relate to his existence and perfections which are not revealed, and are to us perfectly secret. It is said that he is self-existent, and that he exists from eternity to eternity. These truths we believe. We contemplate them. We are amazed at their grandeur. But how he exists we do not know. It does not belong to us. We have nothing to do with it. It is a secret. It belongs to God.—It is said that he knows all things. We believe the fact. It is revealed. But how he knows all things, present, past, and future, is not revealed. It is a secret. It belongs to God. It does not concern us.—He is omnipresent. We have no doubt of the fact. But we do not know how he is in every part of the universe at the same time. This is a point which does not concern us.

It is not revealed. It is a secret. It therefore belongs to God.—The more we contemplate the Divine Being, the more thoroughly we are convinced that all which is revealed respecting him does deeply concern us in our highest capacity, and that we have no concern with that which is not revealed. It is a secret, and belongs to him who is incomprehensible in his existence and adorable perfections.

The perfect unity of God, is a doctrine to which we give our unqualified assent. The dictates of reason and the indications of nature give their testimony in favor of it. In the Holy Scriptures, it is plainly revealed, and incontrovertibly established. In the same Scriptures, it is asserted, and we believe the assertion, that the one God exists in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the same in essence, and equal in every perfection. In representing the threefold distinction in the divine nature, the term *person* is employed, because it is the best term that can be selected for the purpose. It coincides with the phraseology of the Sacred Scriptures. It is in perfect agreement with the language which the Father uses in speaking to and of the Son, which the Son uses in speaking to and of the Father, and which the Father and Son use in speaking of the Holy Spirit. Now, if we look into the Scriptures, we may learn from them that each of these three persons is God. For the perfections, works and titles are ascribed to the Father which, can be ascribed to no other being than the only living and true God; the perfections, works and titles are ascribed to the Son, which can be ascribed to no other being than the only living and true God; and the perfections, works and titles are ascribed to the Holy Spirit, which can be ascribed to no other being than the only living and true God. But if the Scriptures authorize us to believe that each of the three persons is really God, why must we not believe that there are three Gods? Because the same Scriptures teach us plainly and unequivocally that there is but one God. They do not teach that three Gods are one God, or exist in one God; but that one God exists in three persons. When we speak of the unity of God, we speak in reference to his essence; and when we speak of the Trinity, we speak in reference to the mode of his existence. It may be asked, How can three persons, and each God, be united in one God? I answer, I do not

know. It is revealed that there is one and but one God. It is revealed also that the Father is God, that the Son is God, and that the Holy Spirit is God. But how the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit are united in one God, is not revealed. It is a perfect secret. It does not belong to us. It belongs to God. We believe the fact, that they are united. We rejoice in the fact. It is now, and ever will be, a source of unspeakable consolation to all holy and benevolent beings. But how they are united, is a mystery so profound that an attempt to explain it would be irreverent. The doctrine that asserts the fact, does essentially concern us; and we have reason to lament that its excellence and glory have been greatly marred by efforts made to explain it—that a doctrine so essential to the glorious scheme of redemption should be involved in such obscurity by the numerous analogies and similitudes which the ingenuity of even good men has employed to illustrate it. The honor of the Christian religion, and our most precious interests, demand that we love and defend the doctrine. But let us love and defend it as it stands on the bright page of inspiration.

That God governs all mankind in all their actions, is a doctrine of divine revelation. But men are free moral agents, and are accountable to God for all their moral actions. How, then, can he govern their actions? It may be said that he governs their conduct by placing motives before their minds. But motives, in themselves, have no efficiency; and, of course, they cannot govern actions. It may be said that God causes the motives to operate on the mind so as to produce action; or, in other words, he causes men to act in view of motives. This asserts the fact that God governs mankind, and lays open the process which he adopts in governing them. But still we do not know how he causes us to act by means of motives, any more than how he causes us to hear by means of our ears, or to see by means of our eyes. The fact that he does govern all men, in all their actions, is revealed. It belongs to us. How he governs them is not revealed. It does not concern us. It is a secret, and belongs to God.

That the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person in the Trinity, assumed human nature into a union with his divine nature, and died to make an atonement for the sins of the

world, is plainly revealed in the Holy Scriptures. There is no ground to question whether the second person did assume our nature. It is revealed as a fact. We are capable of understanding it, and we readily believe it. But why the second person, rather than the first or third, assumed our nature, is not revealed. It is a secret, and does not belong to us. It belongs to God. That the divine nature and human nature are united in one person, is a fact of which we have no doubt. But how they are united is a mystery. It is no more contrary to reason that they should be united, than that a human soul should be united with a human body. It is above reason, and above our comprehension. It is not revealed. It is a secret which belongs to God. It is evident, that God could not pardon the sinner, unless some method could be adopted by which he could make the same display of his character in pardoning him which would be made in his eternal punishment. But why he did select and adopt the plan which involved the death of his beloved Son, in preference to all other plans which lay perfectly open to his view, is wholly concealed from us. We must consider it as one of those secrets that do not concern us, that belong entirely to God. It is revealed, that the atonement consists in the sufferings and death of Christ. We are assured that his sufferings in the garden and on the cross were very great. Some suppose that he suffered as much pain as sinners would suffer were they consigned over to the never-ending miseries of hell; that he actually suffered the whole penalty of the divine law. But this supposition appears to be wholly unfounded, and in opposition to the admirable scheme of salvation disclosed in the Gospel. That he suffered amazingly, beyond human conception, is evident from Scripture. But how much he suffered we are wholly unable to determine. We believe the revealed fact, that the Father laid upon him the iniquities of us all; that, by his sufferings, he made a complete atonement, by which the Father can be just to himself and the universe, and, at the same time, justify him that believeth. But the precise quantity of pain he caused his dear Son to endure is not revealed. It does not concern us. It is a secret, and belongs to God.

We learn from the Scriptures that God, in the ages of

eternity, gave to his Son, in the covenant of redemption, ■ certain portion of mankind, to be redeemed by his blood, and made eternally happy in heaven. This doctrine is contained in that memorable prayer which Christ offered but a few hours before his crucifixion. It runs through the Bible, and lies at the foundation of the great work of redemption. There is nothing in the doctrine which is arbitrary or unreasonable. It appears to be perfectly consistent with divine wisdom and benevolence. It allows man the entire possession of liberty and moral agency. It secures to no one an inheritance in heaven, who has not a holy heart, and does not obey the divine commands; and it deprives no one of the inheritance who complies with the terms on which it is offered in the Gospel. The doctrine, so far as it concerns us, is perfectly intelligible. It is easy to conceive of God's choosing a certain number to be happy; of his bringing them into the world; of his working in them to will and do of his good pleasure; and of their working out their salvation with fear and trembling. We can conceive of all these things taking place without any partiality or compulsion on the part of God, and with the entire freedom and moral agency of all who are the happy objects of divine choice. But how many of the human race God gave to his Son, and who they are, and why he should give to him certain individuals, and not others, are questions which we cannot solve. They are secret things. They do not concern us. They belong to God. It belongs to us to understand, believe and love the doctrine to which they relate, as it is revealed in the word of God, and to give diligence to make our calling and our election sure.

Regeneration, by the special influence of the Holy Spirit, is a doctrine of divine revelation. Man, in his natural state, is destitute of holiness, at enmity with God, and in a state of moral ruin. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to renovate him, make him friendly to God, and raise him from his ruined state. Regeneration, which effects this great change, consists in holy love. The Holy Spirit, then, in regeneration, causes the sinner to exercise holy love. But the sinner is commanded to love God, which is the same thing as to make himself a new heart. It seems, then, that the Spirit employs his agency in respect to the very exercise which man is commanded to perform,

and which he does actually perform when he becomes a new creature. How is this to be understood? In order to understand it, we must distinguish between the agency of the Spirit and the agency of man. The Spirit works within man to love God; man loves God. The Holy Spirit causes the sinner to love; the sinner loves. The agency of the Spirit is employed in causing the sinner to love; the agency of the sinner is employed in loving. All this is a matter of fact. But how can the Spirit cause the sinner to act, since the sinner is a free moral agent? I do not know. It is revealed that the Holy Spirit does officially subdue the will of the sinner, and cause him to make himself a new heart; and it is a fact, of which the sinner is conscious, that he acts freely and voluntarily in making himself a new heart. But how the sinner does this under the causing energy of the Holy Spirit, I do not know. It is a secret. It does not belong to man. It belongs to God, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will.

Another doctrine of revelation is the general resurrection. This doctrine is favored by enlightened reason, and the analogy of nature displayed in the vegetable, and many parts of the sensitive world. If we had not, however, stronger evidence to support it than what can be derived from such sources, our prospects as Christians would be dark and cheerless. Though we have no doubt in respect to the fact involved in the doctrine, there are many difficulties, connected with it, which it is impossible for us to solve. It is evident from Scripture, that the bodies of those who are raised from the grave, will be, in an important sense, the same which they had while alive, and which were deposited in the dust. Unless the same be raised, the resurrection body will be entirely new. If it be entirely new, the body will not be raised up again, but created as really as any thing was ever created; which would necessarily imply that, instead of a resurrection, there will be a new creation. Admitting it to be a fact, that every individual will have the same body after the resurrection, that he had before, it is difficult to show in what the sameness or identity consists. It cannot consist in the same particles of matter that belong to it in the successive periods of its existence. For, while we

are alive, particles are continually leaving the body, and different particles take their place. If we say that it consists in certain stamina, or original atoms, we state a theory which has been advocated by wise and good men. But the resurrection body will be spiritual. How can its identity consist in stamina, or atoms, which belong to the body before the resurrection? It is a truth of which we have no doubt, that our bodies will be the same after the resurrection as before. This is revealed. But in what their identity will consist, it is not revealed. It does not concern us. It is a secret, and belongs to God. We believe, also, that the bodies of all who are raised at the last day will be spiritual. But who can explain the fact? Who can show what is the constitution of a spiritual body? Who can tell what qualities essentially belong to it? These are points which do not concern us. They belong to God. It is sufficient for us to know, that when the tremendous trump of the archangel shall sound, we shall be raised from the grave; that our bodies will be spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal, perfectly adapted to the destined state of our undying souls.

The scene which immediately follows the general resurrection is that of the general judgment. It is revealed that Adam and all his posterity will be arraigned before the tribunal of Christ, and be judged by him who is the supreme Judge of the quick and the dead. The assembly will be immense. None will be a mere spectator. Every individual will have a cause at the grand court, in which his eternal interest, and the interest of the whole universe, will be essentially concerned. Every one will appear in his true character. The distinction between saints and sinners will be drawn as in sunbeams. The saint will appear in the beauty and glory of holiness. The sinner will appear in the deformity and turpitude of guilt.

Christ, the Judge, clothed in infinite glory, will pronounce sentence on the whole universe. Every individual will hear the sentence, and feel it in all its weight. It will be righteous, impartial and irreversible. All this we know and believe. It is all clearly revealed, and belongs to us. But when is the judgment to take place? The day is appointed. But of that day knoweth no man. It is not revealed. It is a secret, and belongs to God.—Where

will the judgment be? It may be said that it will be in the air. In which part of the vast expanse? The place where, like the time when, the awful scene will take place, must be considered as a secret which belongs to God.—It is to be admitted as an affecting truth, that we must give an account to the Judge, in the presence of the whole assembled universe, of all the deeds done in the body. In what way shall we give up this account? We have no doubt of the fact, that the disclosure will be made; but how it will be made we have no means of knowing. It is a secret. How the Judge will proceed on the solemn occasion, lies beyond our comprehension. We know something of the general process which human judges adopt with them who are arraigned before their tribunal; but the difference between their process and that which the divine Judge will adopt, is as great as the difference between his thoughts and their thoughts, his ways and their ways. The process of the judgment will be in character of the Judge. It will be guided by infinite wisdom and rectitude. But what it will be, is not revealed. It does not belong to us. It is a profound secret, and belongs to God.

After the tremendous sentence is pronounced on the wicked, they will go away into everlasting punishment. They will be prepared by that great Being who made them, for the state of endless suffering to which they will be consigned. Their bodies will be completely fitted to be inlets of pain. Their consciences will be faithful in reproving them. All their intellectual powers will be active in administering to their wretchedness. They will be forever enlarging their views of God, and of Christ, and of all the grand and glorious doctrines which are now revealed to them. And every advance they make in knowledge of these great and interesting subjects will be an advance in sorrow and anguish. Their views of holy angels, and of many of their former friends and companions in a state of perfect light and happiness, will greatly enhance their own misery. Wherever they turn their eyes, they will see nothing but blackness and darkness. They will distress one another. Their mutual intercourse with each other will be a medium of mutual pain. God will pour out his vengeance upon them to the uttermost of their capacities for suffering. As they will be made vessels of

wrath, every vessel will be perfectly full. In this state of misery, perfect despair of the least possible relief will give an emphasis to their sufferings. We believe all these things. They are revealed. But there are many questions connected with the doctrine of future punishment which cannot be solved. Hell is not a mere state, but a place; it is local. But where is the awful place? On this point we may have an opinion, but we cannot now have knowledge. For it is not revealed. It does not concern us. It should be considered as a secret. We do not know how the body can be an instrument of pain, or in what way it will suffer. How sinners, in their dreary abodes, will have intercourse with one another, and what power they will have to increase each other's torments, are points which do not belong to us. They are not revealed. We know, for it is revealed, that their punishment will be extreme, without mitigation and without end. As soon as the righteous receive the joyful sentence from their Judge, they will ascend with him to the mansions which he has gone to prepare for them. He will present them to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God. They will be perfectly qualified in body and mind for a state of perfect blessedness. Their bodies will be fashioned like the glorious body of their divine Redeemer, adapted, in every respect, to the pure and active spirit which will inhabit them. Their minds will be forever expanding, and God will be forever disclosing to them his perfections, and advancing them in holiness and happiness. They will see God as he is. They will see Christ as he is. Their communion with the Father and with the Son will be intimate, uninterrupted, and eternal. They will maintain intercourse with one another. Their friendship will be that of kindred spirits, founded in holy love, and strengthened by mutual reciprocation of sentiments and joys. So much we may know of the doctrine of the saints' future happiness. But where is heaven? Who can tell its dimensions, enumerate its inhabitants, or describe its grandeur? How will those who dwell in it see the bright and glorious objects which it contains? How will they advance in the knowledge of God? How will he make communications to them? and how will they receive them? How will they converse with one another, and perpetuate an end-

less interchange of thought and feeling? Such questions pertain to secret things, which do not concern either our duty or our happiness. They do not belong to us while we remain in a state of probation. They belong to God.

Let us, in all our inquiries on religious subjects, bear in mind, that secret things belong to the Lord our God, and those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.

We are under solemn obligation to receive, in love, the revelation contained in the Scriptures. It is just such a one as we need. It was given to us to promote our most invaluable interests in time and eternity. If we neglect plain, revealed truths, from a vain curiosity to look into things secret, we act not only against reason and common sense, but against the wisdom and goodness of God. We are not at liberty to receive some parts of the revealed system, and reject others, or to consider some parts as beneficial, and others as useless. Neither have we a right to discard any doctrine or duty in the system, merely because we cannot comprehend it. As God is incomprehensible in his nature, perfections, and designs, it is reasonable to suppose that a system of doctrine and duty which he should reveal, would be beyond the comprehension of his finite creatures. It is our indispensable duty to receive all these things which are revealed, because God has revealed them; and he says, they belong to us.

The ministers of Christ are under obligation to discern the line which separates between secret and revealed things, and to confine their attention to those things which are revealed. These form a glorious system of truth and duty, intimately and harmoniously connected, and infinitely momentous in all its bearings. It is the duty of ministers to preach this system. They may preach it at any time and in any place. If they neglect to explain, illustrate and enforce it, their people have reason to complain of them, because they withhold from them what God has revealed for their spiritual and eternal benefit.

DECREES OF GOD.

KEEP silence, all created things,
 And wait your Maker's nod :
 My soul stands trembling, while she sings
 The honors of her God.

Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown,
 Hang on his firm decree ;
 He sits on no precarious throne,
 Nor borrows leave to be.

Chain'd to his throne a volume lies,
 With all the fates of men ;
 With ev'ry angel's form and size,
 Drawn by th' eternal pen.

His providence unfolds the book,
 And makes his counsels shine ;
 Each op'ning leaf, and ev'ry stroke,
 Fulfils some deep design.

Here he exalts neglected worms
 To sceptres and a crown ;
 And there the following page he turns,
 And treads the monarch down.

(Not Gabriel asks the reason why,
 Nor God the reason gives ;
 Nor dares the fav'rite angel pry
 Between the folded leaves.)

In thy fair book of life and grace,
 Oh, may I find my name
 Recorded in some humble place,
 Beneath my Lord—the Lamb.

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DISAPPOINTMENT

IN THE

LAST DAY.



It appears from the representations of our Lord that many, in the last great day, will experience unutterable disappointment. They expected admittance into heaven, but find it shut against them, and themselves excluded. Of the ten virgins, who went forth with their lamps to meet the bridegroom, only five were received to the marriage feast. The others came and cried for admittance, 'Lord, Lord, open unto us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.' 'Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' 'When once the master of the house has risen up, and shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us, and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are; then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets; but he shall say, I tell you I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.'

May it be deeply impressed, upon both writer and reader, that we are hastening together to the judgment.*

* "I do not believe," say some Unitarians, "that there ever will be any general judgment. The assembled universe, so often spoken of, as gathered at once before the throne of God, to be reciprocally spectators of each other's trial and judgment is, I believe, a mere coinage of the human brain. Certainly the Scriptures assert

that to these eyes and ears its amazing realities will soon be revealed; and if so many, who indulged hopes of heaven, will be disappointed in that day, and find themselves forever excluded, are we sure that *we* shall not be of the number? The bare possibility of such an event should excite the most wakeful apprehensions, and lead to the most diligent searchings of heart. My object in this Tract—an object of sufficient importance, surely, to command attention—will be to expose some of the grounds or reasons of those disappointments with which so many at the last will be overwhelmed.

1. Some will be disappointed, because they did not suppose any *particular traits of character were requisite*, in order to entitle them to the heavenly kingdom. They supposed that Christ died for all, in such a sense, that all of every character were authorized to expect salvation in his name. Or they believed that some means were provided, they hardly knew what, by which the whole race of men, without distinction, would eventually be received to heaven. Consequently they lived thoughtless and careless, engrossed with the trifles and the pleasures of the world, and neglected to form those holy, religious characters which many around them believed to be necessary. But—as there is any truth in the Bible—when persons of this description appear in the other world, they will find themselves most grievously disappointed. When they appear at heaven's gate, it will be shut against them; and shut, not only by the decree of the Saviour, but by the necessity of the case. They will be entirely unmeet for heaven. They will have an utter disrelish for divine employments and heavenly joys. They will see, that they could not be happy in heaven, if admitted, and, to

no such thing." Christian Examiner, Vol. ix. p. 30. This also is understood to be the sentiment of Universalists generally. See Universalist Expositor, Vol. i. No. 2. With such persons, I cannot enter into any dispute. The awful plainness and solemnity of the subject forbid it. *God* hath said, that "he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained;" and that "we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." The declarations of Scripture, on this subject, need no explanation. And those who are not convinced by the testimony of God, most assuredly would not be by the reasonings of man.

their endless confusion, they will find, too late, that the blissful regions have no place for them. They must be excluded in outer darkness, and take their portion among the despairing and the miserable forever.

2. Not a few will be disappointed, when they appear before God in the other world, because they expected to have *there* a space for repentance. Unlike the class of whom I have spoken, these believed in the necessity of repentance ; but they did not believe that the space for repentance was limited to the present world. They hoped it would be extended to the other world ; and consequently, if they neglected religion here, that they should have an opportunity of embracing it hereafter. On this ground, they ventured to waste their time on earth, and to abuse the many opportunities with which they were favored. They loved the ways of sin, and presumed to persist in them, expecting there would be time enough for repentance, and a more convenient season for securing salvation, beyond the grave. But alas ! when the thread of life is severed, and their immortal spirits appear in eternity, they find that they have been mistaken. They find, that as the tree has fallen, so it must lie ; and that in the miserable state on which they have entered, no change for the better is to be expected. They must now reap according to that they have sown, and must be regarded and treated forever according to the deeds done in the body. Contrary to all previous expectation, they find that their probation is ended, their space for repentance closed, and their souls irrecoverably lost. Thus their once cherished hopes have vanished like a dream, and they are destroyed, and that without remedy.

3. Many will be disappointed, when summoned into the other world, because they *did not live so long as they expected*. They believed that a return to God was necessary to prepare them to enjoy his presence and favor, and that this return must be accomplished on earth, or never ; but still they did not think there was any need of haste. They were in the vigor of their days, in the full enjoyment of health ; and if they thought of death at all, they thought of it only as a distant event. They were often warned that life was short and uncertain, and that their eternal well-being was at hazard ; and they not unfre-

quently made resolutions that when they had arrived at a certain period, they would repent. But when the promised period came, they were not ready. They found the same hindrances and objections as before, and that these were rather increased than diminished by delay. Of course, they could not attend to the subject then, but still did not cease to hope that some more convenient season would arrive. In this way, life ran to waste, death was comparatively excluded from their thoughts, and the concerns of the immortal soul were neglected and forgotten. But in an unexpected manner and moment, disease invaded, and the dread messenger approached. They had scarcely time to look about them, and realize their situation, before all hope of life was extinguished, and the arm of the king of terrors was lifted for their destruction. At this dreadful hour their distress and horror were unspeakable. They shuddered—they resolved—they entreated for mercy: but nothing could stay or avert the lifted hand of death. It fell—it despatched them—it sent them into the eternal world—it disclosed to them in a moment that all was lost. It showed them that the half of their doom had not been told them, and left them to wail on forever, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.'

4. Numbers will be disappointed hereafter, because they have mistaken the *true character of God*. They believed that persons must love God in order to enjoy him, and they flattered themselves that they did love him. They supposed, indeed, that they had always loved him, and that the love of God was one of the most natural affections of the human heart. They could not doubt that they were the friends of God, and that the judgment scene would test the sincerity of their friendship. But when they appear in the eternal world, to their unutterable confusion, they find, that the God they loved so well is not there. They discover that their God was a mere fiction, and had no existence save in their own imaginings: for instead of taking the character of God as he had himself revealed it, they fashioned it after their own fancies, and no wonder they loved it. No wonder they pleased themselves with the airy delusion. But though the phantom has fled, they find that the God of the Bible, the God

of heaven remains. He remains, just as he revealed himself, glorious in holiness, angry with the wicked, delighting to show mercy to the penitent; but he will by no means tarnish the honor of his law, or clear the guilty. How shall they meet this holy and just God? How shall they stand before him, and answer for denying him? They feel that they cannot do it; and in consternation and confusion they cry to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne.

5. Another class will be disappointed in the judgment, because they have *mistaken the nature of true religion*. They believed religion necessary, as a preparation for death, and they clung to something which they thought was religion. They continued to cling to it to the last. But the moment they step into eternity, they find that they have been deceived. They have mistaken the shadow for the substance, and have clung to that which cannot support them.

Some mistake their *orthodoxy* for religion, and because they are speculatively correct in their religious opinions, flatter themselves that they shall be accepted. But let such persons remember, that self-flattery like this is no part of orthodoxy—that there is such a thing as ‘holding the *truth* in unrighteousness’—that an enlightened head renders an unsanctified heart the more inexcusable—and that mere speculation, however correct and extended, cannot save them. ‘Thou believest there is one God,’ and believest many things which he has revealed; ‘thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble.’

Some mistake their *sincerity* for religion, and think it enough to ensure their salvation that they are not chargeable with conscious hypocrisy. They sincerely believe what they profess, and this is all that can properly be required of them. Persons of this character—and it may be feared they are not few—seem not to know, that in the search of truth and duty, men may be blinded and deceived; that they may be sincerely wrong, as well as sincerely right; and that “there is a way which *seemeth right* unto some, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” The Hindoo may be sincere, in his self-immolation. The Mohammedan may be sincere, in his long

and tiresome pilgrimage to the birth-place of the prophet. The Catholic may be sincere in attempting to buy the grace of God for money. Paul was very sincere, in the sense in which the word is here used, in persecuting the church of God. 'I *verily thought*,' says he, 'that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.' Yet he was at this time 'a blasphemer and injurious,' and had he persisted, he must have perished forever.

Some mistake *external morality* for religion, and because they treat their fellow men with justice and kindness, and perform the relative and social duties, fancy that they have all the religion which they shall ever need. They feel no deep sense of sin, and no need of a Saviour's cleansing blood; and though they live in a neglect of prayer and all the duties which they owe to God, they are content to rest on their own supposed righteousness, as the foundation of their hopes, and their preparation for heaven.—Notwithstanding the absurdity of views such as these, there are multitudes, it may be feared, who entertain them. Thousands under the gospel are living, dying, and going into eternity, with no better religion than this. How great must be their disappointment, when summoned into the presence of God in all the confidence of self-righteous expectation, to find that heaven has no place for them: to find that a preparation for heaven is a very different thing from what they had supposed: to find that all who rise to that world, go there, not on the ground of their own righteousness, but as those who have been pardoned for the sake of Christ: to find that the feeling which pervades all heaven is, 'Not unto us, not unto us, but to Him who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be all the glory of our salvation.'

Others mistake the nature of religion in a different way. They think it enough that they have had convictions of sin; that they have passed through something which they call conversion; that they have made a public profession of their faith; and are commonly regarded and spoken of as Christians. They do not love the duties of religion, and they neglect these duties as often as decency will allow. Their hearts are set upon the world, and they pursue it with unremitting ardor. Still, strange as it may

seem, they do not doubt that their hearts have been renewed, that they have the essentials of religion, and that they are prepared to die in peace. Such persons seem to suppose that, in order to be religious, it is only necessary to pass through a certain process usually denominated conviction and conversion ; and that prayer, and watchfulness, communion with God, and a strict religious life (though well enough for those who like them) are wholly unnecessary. Consequently, though they live after the manner of the world, and perhaps more loosely than many who make no pretensions to piety, they never doubt the reality of their religion or the goodness of their hope. But, if the representations of the Saviour are at all to be credited, such persons are preparing for an overwhelming disappointment. A shoreless eternity is before them ; time, with resistless current, is bearing them on towards it, and the moment they enter there, they will find that they have no support. They will discover, at a glance, that they have been deceived, that they have mistaken the nature of true religion, that the gate of heaven is shut against them, and their souls are lost. And though they may stand without, and cry, ' Lord, Lord, open unto us ; we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets ; ' a voice of thunder will reply, ' I know you not whence ye are ; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.'

6. Many will be disappointed at the last, because they have mistaken the character of their *own exercises and feelings*. They believed that religion was necessary as a preparation for heaven, and that true religion is in its nature spiritual, having its seat in the affections of the soul. They trusted, also, that their own affections were of the right kind, and consequently that their title to heaven was sure ; but in this respect their hearts deceived them.

Some mistake the excitement of mere animal sensibilities for the glow and fervor of religious affection. We are so constituted as to be susceptible of a variety of feelings connected with our animal nature, such as fear, joy, grief, natural affection, &c. These animal feelings are not unfrequently excited by religious considerations. The sufferings of Christ, the worth of the soul, the joys

of heaven, and the pains of hell, may be so presented to the mind, as to excite hopes and fears, desires and sympathies which are entirely of an animal nature. Feelings of this kind are usually ardent, strong, palpable to the sense, and peculiarly calculated to deceive the unwary. In many instances, they have been mistaken for holy affections, and persons, on the ground of them, have made high professions and indulged confident hopes. A religion of this character is usually transient. The gust of passion quickly subsides, and the sleep of worldliness returns. Or, where this is not strictly the case, the character is unstable, fitful, subject to inconsistencies and extravagancies, and easily distinguishable from the course of the just, which shines brighter and brighter to the perfect day. Still, those who are deceived by feelings such as have been described, are usually fond of the delusion, and refuse to renounce it. They think much of their high religious exercises, perhaps boast of them, and regard themselves as elevated almost above the region of doubt, or the ordinary necessity of self-scrutiny. O what must be the disappointment of such persons, their weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, when they shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, and all the ransomed of the Lord, in the kingdom of glory, and they themselves thrust out !

But there is another mistake in regard to the nature of religious exercises, by which many are preparing themselves for disappointment hereafter. They do not distinguish between holy and selfish affections, and because their selfishness assumes a religious aspect, they please themselves with the idea that it is religion itself. They have something which they call the love of God, but it is a mere selfish love : they love him because they think he loves them, and is determined to save them.* Their re-

* Some may think that the same selfish love which is here condemned is inculcated by the apostle John. " We love him *because* he first loved us." 1 John iv. 19. But a moment's attention to the previous verses will convince any candid person that this is a mistake. The apostle does not describe the love of God to us *personally* as the *motive* which should excite our love to him ; but the love of God, in sending " his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," and in " giving us of his Spirit " to renew our hearts, he represents as the first cause of all religious affection ; so that it is strictly true,

pentance too is of the same character. If anything more than mere compunction of conscience, or animal grief—if it is a sorrow of the heart at all, it is selfish sorrow ;—a sorrow for sin, not because it is wrong in itself, and has been committed against God, but because it is likely to injure them. With the same kind of affection they embrace the Saviour. They believe he has died for them, and will certainly save them, and they love him for the favors which they expect to receive from him. Under ■ delusion such as this, persons may also experience a joy in religion, which they mistake for holy joy, but which is entirely selfish. They believe that God loves them, and has pardoned all their sins, and will certainly make them happy forever ; and with such impressions, who would not rejoice ? These selfish affections may at times be ardent, may rise very high, and may leave the possessor of them in no doubt as to the reality of his religion, while it is obvious to other eyes that they have nothing of the nature of true religion in them. They are spurious, counterfeit, terminating on self and not on God, and such as a holy God cannot approve.—Persons deceived in this way will be very likely to go on, trusting to their false hopes and selfish affections, till the light of eternity undeceives them ; and then their disappointment will be extreme. Thinking nothing but that they have religion, and their foundation is strong, till their eyes are opened in the other world ; what fearfulness must surprise them, what untold horrors must come over them, to find that they have been deceived, that they have no religion, that their lamps when most needed are gone out, and they are left in eternal night !

It may be easily conceived, that the disappointments, with which so many will be overtaken at the last, must be unutterably dreadful. Disappointments are painful,


that had he not first loved us, and had he not manifested his love in the ways which have been pointed out, we never should have been brought to the exercise of a true love to him. Had he not given his Son to die for us, and his Spirit to sanctify us, how should we have been delivered from the bondage of corruption ? And how should the true love of God ever have been shed abroad in our hearts ? This love is a very different thing from that selfish affection of which I have spoken, and by which so many, it may be feared, are fatally deceived.

often almost beyond endurance, in the comparatively trifling concerns of the present life. Who then shall describe the anguish of disappointed, despairing souls, when the curtain of sense is withdrawn, and the scenes of the invisible world appear? Who can conceive the misery of those, whose unsuspected, long-cherished hopes suddenly vanish, in the blaze of eternity, and under the searching eye of Jehovah? They see the celestial city afar off, but it is shut against them. They see the happy company of the redeemed, but they must never be of their number. Instead of the approbation of God, they meet his frown. Instead of his favor, they endure his wrath. In place of expected glory and peace, they feel the gnawings of the never-dying worm, and the burnings of unquenchable fire. And what puts the seal upon their destruction is, they know it is irreversible. They know their dreadful state is fixed. Could they look forward to any period, however distant, when they should enjoy again the offers of the gospel, it would be some relief; but no such prospect is presented. All around them is the blackness of darkness. All is horror and despair. And to meet this, in place of an expected heaven of glory and bliss,—what a difference! What a depth of disappointment and wo!

To conceive of the subject more fully, make it, reader, your own case. You now indulge a hope of heaven. You flatter yourself that you have reason to hope. Your hope is dear to you, and you are unwilling to relinquish it. But admit it as *possible*, at least for a moment, that you may be deceived, and that were you called away in your present state, you must be found among the miserable. Suppose also that your summons had arrived, that the scenes of eternity had opened, and your future miseries were now disclosed. O tell me, fellow traveller to the judgment, tell me if you can, what would be your feelings under such circumstances! What a fearfulness would surprise you! What a shuddering horror would come over you! What a disappointment would overwhelm you! Such a destruction of your fondest hopes—such a dashing of your most cherished expectations—such a fall—such a ruin;—how could you or I sustain it!

And yet, is it not possible, beloved reader, that we

may be deceived ? Is it not possible that we are preparing all this disappointment and ruin for ourselves ? I put these questions, not to inflict needless pain, but to give seasonable warning. We *need not* be deceived. We are under no necessity of urging our way onward to the judgment with 'a lie in our right hand.' Some of the more common grounds of deception and disappointment have been pointed out. Are we resting on them ? Let every reader search his deceitful heart to the bottom, and determine for himself. There is a hope which, in the hour of trial, will be as an anchor to the tossed soul ; and there is a hope which is as the spider's web. There is a hope of more value than worlds ; and there is a hope which is worse than nothing. Both, reader, are before you. Both are within your reach. Give all diligence, and you may secure the one ; sleep on in false security, and you must hold to the other. Every thing invites to instant watchfulness, examination, and effort. The suggestions of reason, the whispers of conscience, the decisions of God's word, all unite in saying, ' Be not deceived ; God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' Heaven lifts its portals to allure you upward ; hell warns you with terrific murmurs to turn away and come not thither ; while a voice from the throne of judgment, loud as seven thunders, breaks upon the ear, '*Prepare to meet thy God.*'



HOPING, YET TREMBLING.

My soul would fain indulge a hope
To reach the heavenly shore ;
And when I drop this dying flesh,
That I shall sin no more.

I hope to hear, and join the song,
That saints and angels raise ;
And while eternal ages roll,
To sing eternal praise.

But oh—this dreadful heart of sin !
It may deceive me still ;
And while I look for joys above,
May plunge me down to hell.

The scene must then forever close,
Probation at an end ;
No gospel grace can reach me there,
No pardon there descend.

Come then, O blessed Jesus, come,
To me thy Spirit give ;
Shine through a dark, benighted soul,
And bid a sinner live.

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NATURE AND INFLUENCE

OF

FAITH.



ALTHOUGH the nature of faith seems to be very simple and obvious, and the language of the inspired writers respecting it very intelligible; there is perhaps no subject, which has been more perplexing to the minds of men, or on which they have entertained more obscure and erroneous conceptions. This deplorable fact may be accounted for by the following considerations.

1. *The objects of faith are remote from the province of our senses.* Our earliest attention is directed to the present world. As creatures of sense, we form a habit of looking at the things which are seen. When therefore we attempt to get right views of faith, we are under the necessity of casting off the dominion of our early habits; of counteracting the influence of temporal things; of breaking away from the enchantments of sense, and turning the current of our thoughts and feelings into a new channel. No person, who has in earnest attempted this, needs to be told with what difficulties it is attended.

2. Another thing, which renders it difficult for us to get clear and operative views of faith, is, *that the language which describes it has been so often heard and spoken by us without any correspondent conceptions or feelings.* This custom of speaking or hearing the words of inspiration, and of Christian piety, without the conceptions which those words ought to excite, creates a new difficulty. For whenever that language is repeated, the mind is apt to lie in the same listless state, as formerly. We find it hard to bring ourselves to attend in earnest to a subject, which has often passed before us without exciting attention.

3. It is still more to the purpose to observe, that *such is the nature of faith, that it cannot be rightly apprehended without being experienced and felt.* Christian faith does not consist chiefly in a speculative discernment of external objects. It is, in a great measure, a matter of *affection*. But how can an *affection* be properly known, except by those who have been the subjects of it? And even as to real believers, faith exists in them in so low a degree, that they are exposed to something of the same difficulty. For how can they form lucid conceptions of that, which operates in their own minds so feebly, that it is hardly visible?—But

4. It is most of all important to observe, that *right apprehensions of faith are prevented, and mistaken ones occasioned, by dispositions opposed to faith.* The corrupt affections of the heart render us blind to spiritual, holy objects. They not only prevent us from exercising faith, but make us averse to perceive what it is; because such perception would lead to self-reproof and self-condemnation. In this case it is eminently true, “that the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit; for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” And sinful affection, so far as it prevails, hinders spiritual discernment in Christians, as really as in the impenitent.

Such considerations as these may help us to account for the obscure and erroneous views which are commonly entertained of faith, and for the peculiar difficulty which attends all our efforts to make it well understood.

My present object is to illustrate the nature and practical influence of faith. And in doing this, I shall avail myself particularly of the instructions contained in Hebrews, xi.

The sacred writer begins his description thus. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The original word here rendered *substance*, primarily signifies a *pillar* or *basis*, on which any thing is firmly supported, so that it cannot be moved aside or fall. Nearly allied to this is the metaphorical sense; *firm trust, confidence, a certain, unshaken hope*, on which, as a *basis*, the mind *rests*. Faith is full a persuasion of those things which God has re-

vealed, as can in other things be produced by the evidence of our senses. It gives present *subsistence* and *reality* to the objects of hope.

Faith is also *the evidence of things not seen*. It is, as the original word signifies, a *proof*, or *demonstration*, made by *certain evidence*. As here used, it is rather the effect produced in the mind by evidence; *the full persuasion* which results from *the most satisfactory proof*.

You will perceive that the *faith* here spoken of, respects not only the future good, which is made known by the promises of God, and is the proper object of hope, but other invisible things, even things past, which God has made known to us. The very first instance of faith here mentioned, relates to *past* events. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were made by the word of God."

The *foundation* of faith is the *moral perfection of God*, particularly his *veracity*. The understanding of God is infinite; therefore he cannot mistake. God is infinitely holy and good; and therefore he cannot lie. In the exercise of faith, we fix our eye upon a Being of absolute perfection. We know that whatever such a Being declares, must be truth. In this general view, faith seems to have as real a concern with the manifestations which God makes in his *works*, as with the declarations of his *word*. When we observe the works of God in creation and providence, we *believe* that the manifestations he there makes, and the instructions he gives, are *true*. We know that a Being of perfect moral excellence will no more deceive us by the aspect of his countenance, or by the motion of his hand, or by the characters which his finger inscribes on his works, than by the words which he utters.

It is evident that the ultimate foundation of *religious* faith is more sure, than that of the most confident human belief in various other instances. Does our belief rest on the opinion or the testimony of *man*? Man may be mistaken, or may deceive. Does it rest on the deductions of *reason*? Those deductions may be fallacious. But *the word of the LORD* is infallible truth; and so it becomes a foundation for the most certain faith.

The foundation of religious faith must be *the word of God*. It must be a declaration, for the truth of which

the honor of God is pledged. This declaration may, however, be conveyed to us by human testimony. For example; we are informed by John Baptist, and by the Apostles, that God uttered a voice from heaven, saying, *this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. This declaration is the subject of *religious* faith, because, by means of credible witnesses, we come to know that it was the declaration of God. Having satisfactory evidence that God declared this truth, we believe it on the ground of his *veracity*. In whatever way a declaration of God is conveyed to us, our faith in it rests ultimately upon his veracity. This would be perfectly obvious, if we ourselves should hear the divine declaration. And why not, when the same declaration is conveyed to us through the undoubted testimony of others? In both cases, we are first satisfied that God made the declaration. We then believe it with a faith which rests on his veracity. Suppose we become acquainted with a doctrine declared by Socrates, Augustine, or Newton. It is what a *man* declares; a man not divinely inspired; a man, not God. Now do we believe it merely because it is declared by such an one? No. We look for other evidence. But looking for other evidence shows, that we have not perfect confidence in him who makes the declaration.

As the word of God, or the veracity of God in his word, is the ultimate ground of religious faith; so the word of God is *the rule* of faith. If in any respect whatever we believe differently from the word of God; we depart from the rule, and our faith is, in that respect, erroneous. If we believe less than what God reveals, our faith is defective; if more, it has a faulty redundancy. The only way to have our faith right, is to *conform it exactly to the rule of God's word*; taking care, first, to understand the rule correctly, that our faith may not bend to the one side or the other; secondly, to understand it fully, that our faith may not fall short; thirdly, to restrain the lofty aspirings of reason, and the surmises of curiosity, and to be entirely content with the rule, so that our faith may not overleap its bounds.

Before we touch upon the moral tendency, or the practical influence of faith, it is of material importance to observe, that it implies a *right temper of heart*; in other

words, that it implies affections correspondent with the nature of its various objects. It is generally the manner of Scripture, expressly to designate the particular external action or the action of the understanding which is required, and that only, upon the reasonable supposition of its being always attended with suitable feelings. Intelligent creatures, possessed, as we are, of a moral nature, must understand that *moral affection* is to accompany every act of obedience, and that, without it, no act of obedience can be acceptable to the Searcher and Sovereign of the heart. To require the action is, by manifest implication, to require a corresponding state of the heart. And when the action is recorded as having been performed, it is understood that the heart accompanied it. God requires us to *call upon his name*. This, taken in the literal sense, is merely an outward act. But this is not the sense in which it is required. It is evidently required, as an expression of the heart; the heart being understood not only to agree with the devout words uttered by the voice, but to prompt those words. So when the Evangelist gives an account of the *great faith* of the centurion, he simply relates his words and external actions. Every body understands, that those words and actions were indicative of correspondent feelings. Unless understood in this manner, the narrative amounts to nothing.

The principle I have laid down is obviously applicable to every thing which is spoken of in Scripture as a matter of obligation; every thing which relates to man, as a moral agent. If the obligation respects him, as a moral agent; then the performance of the duty required includes the action of the whole man, so far as he is of a moral nature. For example; God says to us, "hear my word;" *hear* it. But the duty enjoined is not hearing with the ear merely, the heart being disobedient; but hearing with a right disposition, and right conduct. Again. Christ requires us *to receive* the sacramental bread and wine *in remembrance of him*. But merely the outward act of *receiving* and the exercise of *memory* do not constitute the duty enjoined. The outward act and the exercise of memory must be accompanied with affections suitable to the nature of what is commemorated. So all Christians understand it. So every thing of the

kind must be understood. And while we have conscience and moral affection, and remember that we are under moral government, we certainly shall so understand it, whether we are expressly told that we must, or not.

I repeat the position, as of primary importance, *that whenever faith is spoken of as a moral virtue, or with regard to its moral influence, we must consider it as implying affections of heart corresponding with the nature of its objects.* Such affections must accompany it, and make a part of it, or, in the Scripture sense, it is not faith.

When I say that faith implies affections corresponding with its various objects, it is the same as saying, that faith assumes a *character* according to the nature of its particular object. If it relates to an object great and awful, it is accompanied with reverence and awe; if to an object that is amiable, it is accompanied with love; if to a future or absent good, with desire; if to something hateful, with abhorrence; if to something injurious or dreadful, with fear or dread. Thus faith may be said to revere, to love, to desire, to hate, or to dread, just according to the nature of its particular object.

We shall now consider *the practical influence of faith.* And before we have done, I think it will be apparent, not only that this influence is very great, but that it results directly and necessarily from the very nature of faith.

In the word of God the most important effects are attributed to *faith*. It is represented as having an efficacy which moves all the springs of action, and controls the whole man. Now a little consideration must satisfy us, that it is in its nature perfectly adapted to produce this mighty effect. For, in truth, what is there in the universe, suited to influence the mind or control the actions of man, which does not belong to *faith*. Those things which God has made known in his word, and which are the *objects* of faith, are of the highest conceivable moment. Indeed they have an importance infinitely above our comprehension. God has set before us a great and endless good to be obtained; a great and endless evil to be avoided. And he has set these before us in all the forms, which are adapted to rouse the affections and the efforts of man. Does any one say, that the endless good

and the endless evil which God has revealed, come not under our observation ; and then ask, how the existence of such things can certainly be known ? My answer is, *Thus saith the Lord*. This is the best of all evidence. Other things may deceive me. But *God cannot lie*. What HE says must be truth. Or does any one say, that the things which God has declared in his word, being *invisible* and *distant*, cannot excite any strong emotion, or any powerful effort ? This, I admit, is true with regard to those who are governed by sense. But it is the very nature of faith to give an uncontrollable efficacy to objects *invisible* and *distant*. All must allow that the things which God has revealed would have a mighty influence upon us, if they were actually *visible* and *present*. To faith they *are* visible. To faith they are *present* too. Faith removes the distance, and makes them present realities. So that things which are not seen, and things which are to take place thousands of ages hence, excite the same emotions, and have the same practical influence, as though they were actually visible, and actually present. In the exercise of faith, we say of unseen and future things ; they are absolutely certain, because God has declared them. They are equally interesting to us, as if they were present ; for they *will* be present ; and we shall experience them and feel them, when happiness will be as dear to us, and misery as dreadful, as they are now. They deserve our regard, therefore, just as though they were present. So that, if the infinite excellencies of God and the employments and pleasures of heaven are sufficient to move the hearts and govern the actions of saints and angels who are now there, they are sufficient to move and govern *us*. If the transactions of the judgment day, if the glorious appearing of the Lord from heaven, the assembling of the universe before him, the disclosure of the secrets of all hearts, the final sentence, the blessedness of the righteous, and the horror and despair of the wicked, will be sufficient to arrest the attention, and touch the feelings, and move all the active powers of those who will be present on that momentous occasion ; they are sufficient to arrest *our* attention, to touch our feelings, and move all our powers of action *now*. And just so far as we have faith, they will do it. Men gene-

rally look at things which are seen. Sensible objects govern their affections, and limit the sphere of their observation. But faith shifts the scene. As to the grand, governing objects of the human mind, and the motives to action, it puts them in a new world. It spreads a shroud over the things of time and sense, and opens to view things unseen and eternal.

Let us now consider the *practical influence* of faith, as exhibited in Heb. xi. and in other parts of Scripture.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” *v. 4.* Abel cordially believed what God had said concerning the Seed of the woman. He listened to the appointment of sacrifices, which were doubtless intended to represent the future atonement; and according to the divine direction, and with correspondent feelings, offered a *sin-offering*. Whereupon God gave him a testimony, that his offering was accepted. Cain’s offering was faulty, because he wanted *faith*; that is, because he did not cordially believe the promise of God, nor render sincere obedience to his appointment.

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death.” *v. 5.* Enoch walked with God. He was habitually sensible of his presence, confided in his promise, and looked at eternal things. Such was the operation of his *faith*. He was rewarded by being taken immediately to heaven without seeing death. Thus he obtained his translation *by faith*.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark.” *v. 7.* Here the nature of faith begins to appear still more clearly. God said, *the end of all flesh is come; behold I will destroy them with the earth*. He then gave command to Noah to make an ark. Though the destruction of the world by a deluge was a thing which no one had ever seen or heard of before; Noah cordially believed that word of God which asserted it. In his view, God’s saying it made it a certainty. He had no more doubt of it, than he had after it had rained forty days and forty nights. Thus he prepared an ark *by faith*; that is, in consequence of his *confidently believing* what God had declared. Had he not believed the declaration of God, he would not have done this.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

v. 8. God commanded Abraham to go out of his country unto another land, and promised to make of him a great nation. Abraham had perfect confidence in God, and so looked upon the thing which he promised, as absolutely certain. This fully accounts for his leaving his kindred, and going out he knew not whither. Simple, childlike faith in God was the principle of his conduct.

The writer, v. 13, clearly exhibits his idea of faith with respect to those servants of God whom he had just mentioned. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises,” (that is, the good things contained in the promises,) “but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.” God had at different times, promised them everlasting blessings in the world to come. These promises they fully believed, and confidently expected the blessings promised. They anticipated those blessings with so strong a desire, and so lively a persuasion of their reality, that they might be said to have already embraced them, and begun to enjoy them. Now all this excitement of feeling, and the conduct which flowed from it, was the effect of a cordial belief in the promises of God, and an assured expectation of their accomplishment.

The nature and influence of faith appeared eminently in the conduct of Abraham respecting Isaac. v. 17—19. God had promised that in Isaac his seed should be called, and all the families of the earth blessed. On *Isaac* every thing seemed to depend. If *he* should die, what would become of the divine promises? What would become of the calling of Abraham’s seed, and the blessing which was to come upon all nations? Yet Abraham had such a belief, so lively and certain a persuasion, that God was true, and would accomplish his word, that he hesitated not, when commanded, to sacrifice Isaac. Why was not Abraham agitated and perplexed with the difficulties, which attended that distressing affair? Why was he not pressed with the various objections which might be urged against the sacrifice of his own son? Simply, because he had *faith*. Faith in God answered all objections; re-

lieved all difficulties. It was enough for Abraham, that God had promised. But how would it be possible for God to fulfil his promise, if Isaac should be slain? With such a question as this, Abraham gave himself no concern. He knew that God had an unfailing resource in himself; that he could do any thing which the case required; that he could, if necessary, even *raise Isaac from the dead*; though the idea of a resurrection from the dead was probably a suggestion of Abraham's strong faith, as no such event had ever taken place. Thus the main-spring of action in this whole affair, was *faith*; that is, a full confidence in the word of God, and a certain, lively expectation that it would be accomplished, whatever difficulties might stand in the way.

Joseph, at the close of his life, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and commanded that his bones should be carried with them into Canaan, *by faith*; that is, because he believed the promise of God respecting that departure, and looked upon it as a reality, a matter of fact,—just as we do now.

We have here an account too of the faith of Moses. He believed the promises of God respecting the deliverance of the Israelites, and the everlasting blessings to be conferred on the faithful in another world. He chose, therefore, to have his lot with his suffering brethren, how much soever it might cost him. The good, which the sure promise of God led him to expect, was, he well knew, infinitely better than all the treasures of Egypt, and infinitely more than an overbalance for all the sufferings to which he might be exposed. He endured as seeing the invisible God, from whom he expected support and deliverance.

At the close of this interesting account, the inspired writer gives a summary description of the efficacy of faith in various other instances, in the following sublime and moving strain.

“What shall I say more? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah, and David, and Samuel, and the prophets; who *through faith*,” that is, *animated and borne on by unwavering confidence in God*, “subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, put to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead, raised to life again ; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword ; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented." What the servants of God did and suffered in all these cases was, *by faith*. They believed the word of God. They were sensible of his presence. They sought and expected the blessings he had promised. They acted with a view to those blessings, and by anticipation lived upon them. God's everlasting kingdom contained a blessedness so great and precious, that it roused all their desires, and all their efforts ; and in pursuit of it hardships and sufferings became light, and the most painful enterprizes easy and delightful. Such was the power of faith.

The chapter to which we have now attended contains, as we have seen, a particular description of the influence of faith,—a description which is very intelligible and impressive, and which can hardly fail to satisfy any attentive reader, as to the exact view which the writer entertained of his subject.

But to cast a still clearer light on this subject, and to illustrate the perfect agreement of the inspired writers respecting it, I shall show that other passages of Scripture exhibit the nature and influence of faith in the same manner.

2 Cor. v. 7. "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Faith is here represented as the essential principle of the Christian life. And what this faith is, we readily learn from the connexion. *We walk,—not by sight* ; that is, we are not influenced in our conduct by a regard to the things which are seen. But *we walk by faith* ; we look at the things which are not seen ; we are influenced by regard to spiritual, eternal objects. And how are those unseen, spiritual objects made known, but by *the word of God* ? And how do we look at them, or regard them, ■

as to be influenced by them, but by *faith*; that is, by cordially believing the word of God?

James i. 6. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." The faith to be exercised in prayer, is here put in opposition to a doubtful, wavering mind, and so must imply a cordial, settled belief in the doctrines and promises of God's word.

In Acts xv. 9, Peter represents, that God purified the hearts of Gentile converts, *by faith*; that is, by a steady, cordial belief in the truths of the Gospel; or which is the same thing, by a steady, cordial regard to those invisible, spiritual things, which the word of God reveals.

But it may perhaps be thought, that there is something in *evangelical faith*, or *faith in Christ*, essentially different from other kinds of faith; and that the account, which I have given of the nature and influence of faith generally, cannot be received as in any measure satisfactory in relation to this particular instance of it. How far such an opinion has any adequate support, a careful attention to the subject will show.

Faith I have represented to be a firm, cordial belief in the veracity of God in all the declarations of his word; or, a full and affectionate confidence in the certainty of those things which God has declared, and because he has declared them. Whatever may be the divine testimony, and to whatever object it may relate, faith receives it, and rests upon it. This is its general nature. That most important branch of faith, called *Evangelical faith*, differs from other instances of faith only in regard to its particular object. The testimony of God, which evangelical faith receives, respects the SAVIOUR. If then you would know what faith in Christ is, in distinction from other exercises of faith; inquire, what is the testimony of God concerning his Son? What does the Scripture say of his character, his works, his instructions, his atonement, his various offices and blessings? This testimony respecting Christ is just what faith receives. Determine precisely what this testimony is, and you determine the peculiar character of evangelical faith.

And here we shall readily see how it comes to pass that faith in Christ so often has the sense of *affectionate trust*, or *affiance*. The object, which the word of God in this

case reveals, and which evangelical faith respects, is obviously, and in the highest degree, worthy of such trust. He is infinitely wise, benevolent, and powerful, and therefore deserves to be trusted by all intelligent beings. He is a glorious, all-sufficient SAVIOUR, and therefore deserves to be trusted in by sinners. Cordial affiance, or trust, is the very disposition in us, which is agreeable to the character and offices of Christ. To admit that there is such a Saviour, and yet to repose no affectionate trust in him, would be a shocking and most criminal inconsistency. Accordingly, this affectionate trust, which always accompanies faith when such is its object, becomes frequently the principal thing signified by the word.

By this principle, you may easily trace out the particular senses, in which the word, *faith*, is used in various other passages of Scripture. First, see what is the nature of the object, to which faith has respect in the particular case to be considered. Then see what is the temper of mind with which we ought to contemplate that object; or what is the effect it ought to produce upon us. That temper of mind, that proper effect of faith may become the chief thing intended by the word. In some passages, for example, faith is obviously used for *conversion to Christianity*; because such conversion is *the proper consequence of believing the truths of the Gospel*.

In other places, faith seems to denote *obedience*; because faith respects Christ as a Lawgiver and Ruler, and so directly leads to obedience; and a man who should believe Christ to be such a Ruler, and yet not obey him, would act most inconsistently and perversely.

PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS.

1. We are led to reflect on the general character of *false faith*. False faith always misapprehends, in one way or another, the meaning of the divine testimony. This is one of its chief faults. The other is, that even where, in speculation, it correctly understands the divine testimony, it is wanting in right feeling.

There is one particular description of faith, which has at times had no small credit in the Christian world, but which is easily proved to be unscriptural and false, by the principles established in the foregoing discussion.

In the exercise of that kind of faith to which I now refer, a man believes, without regard to his character, that Christ died for him in particular, and has forgiven, or certainly will forgive his sins. Now true faith always looks to the divine testimony, and is conformed to it. In this case, then, the proper question is, what is the testimony of God respecting those who are pardoned, and to whom the blessings of Christ's death are promised? The answer is at hand. "Repent and believe, that your sins may be blotted out." "He that believeth on the Son, hath life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." But under the influence of that sort of faith, which I would now expose, a man believes, without any evidence of piety, that God has forgiven his sins, and made him an heir of heaven. He has not repented; has not been born again; is without holiness. Still he believes that his sins are forgiven, and his name written in heaven. But in believing this, he *disbelieves* the divine testimony. The Scripture declares, that no man of such a character is pardoned. He believes that he is pardoned, because he does not believe the word of God.

We have here, then, a general test of faith. It is not our business to inquire, whether any man's faith is agreeable to this or that system of opinions, to such a deduction of reason, or to such a dream of fancy. Our simple inquiry is, whether it is agreeable to the word of God; whether, as to apprehension and feeling, it is an exact counterpart to the divine testimony.

2. It is easy to see *what influence Christian faith must have in forming our religious opinions*. A man of faith regulates his opinions by the only rule of faith, *the word of God*. Whatever may be the subject of investigation, he seeks to know what God the Lord will say. Whether the doctrines of Scripture are agreeable to his previous views, or not; whether comprehensible, or incomprehensible, is not his question at all. When he finds what God says, his inquiry is ended; his opinions are fixed. But a man wanting in Christian faith is not satisfied with this. He may indeed perceive what God says; but he must look further. One says; how can this be? It is so in-

consistent with reason, so different from every thing which nature and philosophy teach, that I must regard it as utterly incredible. Another asks, whether the doctrine in question would be agreeable to his particular party. The object of inquiry with a third is, whether the doctrine proposed would require him to deny any of his inclinations, or to forego any of his honors or pleasures. In despite of the clearest evidence from the word of God, they govern their opinions by just such considerations as these. And all this, because they have not the principle of *faith*. What wonder is it then, that men, destitute of faith, should be carried about with every wind of doctrine, and embrace opinions as distant as possible from the decisions of holy writ.

We see also, that Christians are likely to agree in their religious opinions, in proportion to the activity and strength of their faith. The testimony of God is one. The rule of their opinions is one. If their faith is active in searching after the testimony of God, and strong to receive it whatever it may be, they are surely in the way to union.

3. Faith *exalts* and *glorifies* God. The Apostle says, Romans iv. 20, 21, that "Abraham staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform." The promise, as you will recollect, was one which seemed impossible to be performed. But Abraham readily believed it, and anticipated the performance of it as a certainty. He was as fully persuaded of it, as though it had already taken place. All this he believed, purely because God had promised it. Now this persuasion of Abraham's mind was highly honorable to God. Whenever we believe any thing on the authority of God's word, we honor him, as a God of truth. This is eminently the case when the accomplishment of God's word is attended with peculiar difficulties, so that our believing it can arise from no cause, but our confidence in the divine veracity and power. Again; Abraham saw the land of Canaan in the possession of a ferocious and powerful people. Yet because he had confidence in God, he believed that the land would be given to his children for an inheritance. Isaac and Jacob believed the same,

though to human reason nothing could appear more improbable. The faith of Christians honors God in the same way. They know the greatness of their guilt, the penalty of the law, the justice of God. And yet they believe, purely on the authority of God's word, that they may be pardoned. They know the deceit, the hardness, the obstinacy of their hearts; and yet they have such confidence in God, that they are persuaded he can heal these spiritual maladies, and make them holy. They have such an apprehension of the love, the power, and the faithfulness of God, that they confidently believe, because he hath said it, that all nations, how deplorable soever their present condition, shall be given to Christ for an inheritance; that idolatry, and superstition, and every form of sin and misery shall be banished from the world; that kings, and rulers, and all people shall bow to the King of Zion, and the knowledge of the Lord fill the earth. However difficult the work which God promises to perform; however diverse from any thing they ever knew in other cases; they have such honorable apprehensions of God, that they believe it will certainly be accomplished. Thus, in the exercise of faith, they show their high estimation of the glorious character of God; and this most of all, when they themselves are in straits; when they can see nothing but darkness and danger, and when, so far as human power can go, their case is hopeless. To repose trust in God in such circumstances; to look to him for support, direction and deliverance, when all other help fails, shows what exalted thoughts they entertain of his infinite perfections.

4. It is obvious that *all the defects of our character and conduct are owing to the want or the weakness of faith.*

Without faith in the general sense, man has in fact no motives to a holy life; because all the motives to holiness are found in those invisible things which are the objects of faith, and which are brought by faith to have an influence on the mind. Were there no God, no moral government, no law with divine sanctions, no eternal retribution, there would be no motives to holiness. And if a man does not cordially *believe* in a moral law and government, and a future retribution, it will be to him just as

though there were none. In other words, there will be nothing, there can be nothing, which will have any influence upon him, as a motive to holy action. It is clear then that faith, in this view, is indispensable to the exercise of holiness. But not to dwell upon this general notion of faith; we know that the Scriptures in various places represent the want or weakness of *Christian faith*, as the cause of what is faulty in the character and conduct of men.

Suffer me then, Christian brethren, to use freedom of speech on this subject, and to ask whether a *worldly spirit* is not one of the prominent faults of our character. Do we not set our affections on earthly friends, relations, riches, honors, and enjoyments? Does not a regard to these govern our conduct? Do not the zeal and diligence we show in our pursuits spring chiefly from this source? See here the consequence of the want of faith. "This is the victory which overcometh the world," says an Apostle, "even our faith." If we had faith; that is, if we cordially and steadily believed what the Scriptures teach; if we had an abiding, lively sense of the glory of God, the excellence of his law and government, our guilty, and wretched state, the beauty and all-sufficiency of Christ, the endless joys of heaven and the endless sufferings of hell; if these objects were continually present to our view, and our understandings and hearts were filled with them; the things of this dying world would all sink into nothing. No earthly pleasures could allure us. None of the honors or riches of the world could excite our desire. Upon them all we should see the broad stamp of vanity and insignificance, and a worldly spirit would die away.

Are we not conscious of a lamentable degree of *insensibility* and *sloth* in the concerns of religion? And how is this to be accounted for? Are not the eternal objects made known by the word of God, of sufficient importance to rouse our attention? Is not the favor of him who made us, and of him who died for us, and the enjoyment of his everlasting kingdom, worthy of being sought with diligence? Is not an eternity of insupportable suffering dreadful enough to excite our most watchful care to avoid it? Yes, brethren. But our *unbelief* makes all these

appear distant and uncertain. It takes away from things eternal their power to interest the heart, and to produce emotion and effort, and leaves us as supine and dormant, as though the glorious objects of religion had no existence.

'Tis unbelief also, that renders us so *indifferent to the salvation of sinners, and the prosperity of the church*. Did we see eternal things in the light of divine truth, and apprehend, in any suitable measure, their importance, their certainty, and their nearness; what a lively sensibility should we have to the interests of our connections, and friends, and all our fellow men! What concern for immortal souls, ready to perish! What strong desire for their redemption from sin and death! How alive should we be to every thing which stands connected with the prosperity of the church, and the interests of eternity!

It is the want of a lively faith in the great things of the unseen world, that renders us so *superficial and heartless in our devotions*. If in our seasons of secret and social worship, we should have *faith*; if we should look into eternity; should see just before us the resurrection of the dead, the judgment seat, and all the generations of men assembled to receive their irreversible doom; could we be dull and wandering in our prayers? If we knew that all these things were shortly to burst upon our view; would earthly trifles be suffered to break in upon our devotions? Would not all the ardor of our souls be kindled up in our addresses to our God and our Judge?

To this same source we may trace all the follies and sins apparent in our lives. If the eye of our faith were always open, and always fixed on the certain, tremendous, glorious things of another world; if, wherever we went, and whatever we did, these eternal objects were present to our view, and had full possession of our feelings; every irregular passion would lose its power, and we should become circumspect and holy in all our conduct.

And is it indeed so, that our earthly mindedness, our insensibility and sloth in religion, our indifference in regard to the prosperity of the church and the salvation of sinners, our dull and heartless devotions, and all the irregularities of our temper and conduct are owing to the want of a steady, strong, lively faith? Of what vast

importance is it, then, that we should possess such faith ; and of course, that we should diligently employ those means which are suited to promote it.

Here let me say, that the principal means of promoting a strong, lively faith, is the *exercise* of it. It results from the constitution of the mind, that all our affections and habits are strengthened by exercise. Every time, therefore, that we view eternal things in the light of revelation ; every time we look at them with a full persuasion of their certainty, and a suitable sense of their importance ; we do something towards promoting a strong, steady faith. This salutary influence of exercising faith is not however in all cases equal in degree, but will be very much according to circumstances ; and particularly will it be in proportion to the difficulty which attends such an exercise. A single instance of faith, in circumstances like those in which Abraham confidently believed the promise of God, will go farther towards establishing a living principle of faith in the mind, than many acts of faith, where no difficulty is encountered. In such a case as that of Abraham, there is a struggle, a contest. Obstacles are met and removed ; enemies are subdued ; and the power of faith is established. Take care, then, brethren, when difficulties multiply ; when dark clouds are spread over you ; when sense and reason are non-plussed, and you have nothing in heaven or earth to rest upon, but the simple word of God ; in such cases, take care to have faith, strong faith. Go forth at the divine word, leaving all, and not knowing whither you go. Hesitate not to encounter difficulties, or to make sacrifices ; and while you are in the way of obedience to God, never doubt that his grace will be sufficient for you.

I have only one more remark ; namely ; that *clear* views and *deep* impressions of divine things, and *powerful* movings of affection towards them, or, which is the same thing, *strong, animated* exercises of faith, will do vastly more towards a habit of faith, than other exercises which are comparatively feeble and lifeless. You may exercise a weak, unanimated faith many years, and not do so much towards giving the mind the character of steady, unyielding faith, as may be done in an hour, or a minute, in which eternal things come with clearness to the soul,

waking up all its powers, and exciting acts of vigorous, undivided, unwavering faith. Such acts of faith have an abiding influence. They produce a permanent character : something as our being transported into the third heaven, and seeing and hearing what Paul saw and heard, would produce an impression on our minds that would remain through life, and show its effects through eternity.

Let us then be sensible how vastly important it is, that divine, eternal things should take deep hold on our minds ; should excite strong emotions ; should rouse all our powers to action ; should fill our capacities, and exhaust the energies of our souls. And let us seize every occasion, and apply ourselves to every means, favorable to such a state of mind. By retirement ; by watchful care not to be engrossed with earthly pursuits ; by devoutly reading the Scriptures ; by heavenly contemplation ; by mortifying all sinful affection ; by spiritual converse with divine and eternal objects, and by ardent, incessant desires and prayers after them, let us endeavour to get away from the delusion of sensible things ; to rise above the present world, and to bring our understandings and hearts under the influence of divine truth ; deeming ourselves happy, when favored with a few moments of clear, spiritual knowledge, and strong faith ; and then advancing from moments to hours, and from hours to days, till we come to look with an undiverted eye at things not seen and eternal, and from morning to night, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, have our feelings and actions all swayed by faith in God. Oh ! blessed attainment ! When shall we rise to any thing like this ? LORD, *increase our faith.*

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THE PLEA OF SINNERS

AGAINST

ENDLESS PUNISHMENT.



EVER since the first apostacy of mankind, they have been disposed to contend with God, respecting his character, his laws, and government. They have called in question his sovereignty, his justice, and even his goodness. They have complained of the precepts and penalties of his holy and righteous laws. They have arraigned the justice and equity of his government, and said, that the ways of the Lord are not equal. But God has always been willing to meet their complaints and settle the controversy between them, upon the most just and solid grounds. By Micah, he challenges them to the contest. "Hear ye now what the Lord saith; arise, contend before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice. Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me." In Isaiah xli. 24, he calls upon them to reason the case with him fairly. "Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob." God seems to take it for granted, that those who call in question the excellence of his character, and the rectitude of his laws and government, suppose that they have reasons, and even strong reasons for their erroneous feelings and opinions. It is true that some who imbibe false and dangerous opinions in religion, choose to conceal them for a time at least; but those who avow their errors, profess to have, and presume to offer, what they deem strong reasons for their religious errors. Skeptics, atheists,

and deists, profess to have what they deem strong reasons for their various opinions, and often produce them. Though Universalists formerly chose to confine their peculiar sentiments in their own breasts; yet lately, they are very free to write, to preach, and to publish their errors, and bring forth their strong reasons in support of them. It is, therefore, my present design, to meet this class of errorists, and examine the force of their *strong reasons*, and see whether they are sufficient to support the peculiar doctrine, which they build upon them. I propose to examine the five following principles, upon which they argue in favor of their peculiar doctrine.

1. The universal goodness of God.
2. The universal atonement of Christ.
3. The universal offers of salvation.
4. The universal goodness of mankind.
5. Their universal punishment in this life.

These, I presume, they will all allow, are the strongest reasons they have, in support of the doctrine of universal salvation, and those upon which they most confidently rely.

1. Let us inquire whether it can be fairly inferred from the universal goodness of God, that he will finally save all men. It is readily granted, that the goodness of God extends to all intelligent creatures, and even to all creatures that possess the least sensibility or capacity of enjoying happiness, or suffering pain. (He is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works. His goodness consists in the love of benevolence, and in the love of complacence. His love of benevolence is universal, and extends to all creatures, without any respect to their moral characters. He values the happiness of every individual according to its worth, whether he has a good moral character, or a bad moral character, or no moral character at all. He values the happiness of angels according to its worth, the happiness of mankind according to its worth, the happiness of the spirits in prison according to its worth, and the happiness of all percipient creatures according to its worth. His universal benevolence, therefore, is impartial. He values the happiness of angels more than the happiness of men, the happiness of men more than the happiness of the inferior creation;

because angels are more capable of enjoying happiness than men, and men are more capable of enjoying happiness than animals and insects. His universal goodness is also disinterested. He loves all his creatures, with benevolence, because he loves happiness simply considered, whether it tends to promote his own felicity, or not. And since his benevolence is universal, impartial, and disinterested, he must love the good of all his creatures, more than the good of any individual, or any individuals; and consequently must be disposed to give up the good of any individual or individuals, for the sake of promoting the greatest good of the universe. It is the natural tendency of impartial love to treat every object according to its worth. If a rich man sees his house on fire, and values every article in it according to its worth, but cannot save them all, which will he give up to save the rest? There is no doubt in this case, but he will give up the lumber and least valuable articles, and pass through one apartment after another, and seize his desk, which contains his silver and gold, and most valuable papers, while he suffers all the other articles to be consumed in the flames. Or if his dearest friends and connections are to be preserved, will he not seek to save these, rather than his property? His impartial benevolence, in this situation, would be guided and governed by his wisdom. Apply this to the universal, impartial, and disinterested benevolence of the kind Parent of the universe. Must not his universal, impartial and disinterested love to the happiness of all his creatures lead him to seek the greatest happiness of all, and if necessary for that purpose, to sacrifice the happiness of individuals to the happiness of the whole? And now who will dare to say, but that God, in his *universal goodness*, guided by his perfect *wisdom*, did see best to decree before the foundation of the world, that part of the angels should be forever holy and happy, and part of the angels should be forever unholy and miserable, and part of mankind should be forever holy and happy, and part forever unholy and miserable? And if God did see it to be wisest and best to elect some angels and some men to eternal life, and reprobate some angels and some men to endless death, who will dare to say, that it was inconsistent with his

universal goodness and wisdom thus to elect and thus to reprobate some angels and some men ? There is, therefore, no force at all in the argument drawn from the universal goodness of God, to prove the doctrine of universal salvation. It is just as consistent with the universal benevolence of God, to make men miserable in a future state, as in this present evil world, where he inflicts ten thousand temporal evils and calamities upon them. The Universalists themselves could see no plausibility in their argument drawn from the universal benevolence of God, if they did not designedly or undesignedly overlook the distinction between God's love of benevolence and love of complacence. Though God's love of benevolence be universal, yet his love of complacence is not, but confined to those only who bear his moral image, and possess the same benevolent spirit that he possesses. He loves them that love him with the love of complacence, but hates all those who hate his holy and amiable character. Accordingly, he declares in his word, that "he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." God always did and always will love Judas with the love of benevolence, but never did and never will love him with the love of complacence. If the advocates for universal salvation could prove, that God loves all his unholy creatures with the love of complacence, they might fairly infer that he will make them all finally and forever happy ; but they have no right to draw this inference from his universal benevolence.

2. Let us inquire whether the universal atonement of Christ affords a solid argument in favor of the universal salvation of mankind. The Scriptures plainly teach us, that Christ did die on the cross, to make atonement for the sins of the whole world. Christ himself said, "he came to give his life a ransom for many." When John saw Jesus coming to him, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Paul said, "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus ; who gave himself a ransom for all." Again he said, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor ; that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." And

the Apostle John said, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." These passages of Scripture plainly prove, that Christ died in the room of all mankind, and made atonement for every man, without a single exception. He died as much for Judas as for Paul. But we have no right to conclude, that because he died to make atonement for all men, that all men will be saved. And the advocates for universal salvation, would see, in a moment, that no argument could be fairly drawn from the universal atonement of Christ, in favor of their doctrine, if they would only consider the nature of his atonement. The sins of men were not transferred to him, nor was he punished for their sins. He suffered, indeed, for them; but his sufferings did not pay the debt of suffering, which they owed to divine justice. They still deserve to suffer the penalty of that law, which they have transgressed, and which penalty he did not suffer, and which if he had suffered would not have taken away their desert of punishment. Sin is not of the nature of a pecuniary debt, which one person can pay for another, by suffering. The atonement of Christ did nothing more, than display that vindictive justice, which would have been displayed, by executing the penalty of the law upon transgressors of it themselves. It did not render them less guilty or less deserving of punishment, nor lay God, in point of justice, under the least obligation to pardon and save them. It only laid a foundation for God to have mercy on whom he would have mercy, and to appear just in pardoning and justifying any penitent, believing, returning sinner. Though Christ died to make atonement for all men, yet he did not die with a design to save all men. Accordingly he said, "I lay down my life for the sheep," that is, for the elect, whom his Father had given him. Christ's universal atonement is perfectly consistent with God's electing love and discriminating grace. It is true, God has bound himself by *promise to Christ*, to save the elect, but he has not bound himself by promise to save any other of mankind. And it is impossible to prove from the nature and extent of the atonement, that any but the elect will be saved. Let

■ man only understand the nature and design of Christ's atonement, and he cannot draw the least argument from it, in favor of Chauncey's scheme, or Murray's scheme, or Huntington's scheme, or any other scheme of universal salvation. There would not be the shadow of plausibility in the argument drawn from the atonement of Christ; if his atonement were not considered and represented as paying the debt of suffering in the room of sinners, which is absolutely false and absurd. Even the personal suffering of sinners has no tendency to take away their guilt and desert of punishment. The personal suffering of the fallen angels for nearly six thousand years has not taken away any of their guilt or desert of punishment; but they still deserve to be punished, as much as if they never had suffered the least degree of punishment. And if the personal sufferings of sinners cannot take away their guilt and desert of punishment, surely the sufferings of Christ in making atonement cannot take away their guilt and desert of punishment. So that the universal atonement of Christ does not afford the least argument in favor of the doctrine of universal salvation. Nor,

3. Do the universal offers of pardoning mercy to sinners in the gospel, afford the least argument to prove that they all will be saved. It is readily allowed, that the Bible abounds with such free, rich and universal offers of mercy to sinners. The evangelical prophet cries, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Christ cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And in the parable of the gospel feast, he represents all as invited to come and partake of it. We also read, "The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst, come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." These universal offers of pardoning mercy have some true meaning, and the great question now is, what do they mean? Are they to be understood conditionally, or unconditionally? There is a condition to be seen on the very face of them. There is something for men to do on their part, in order

to possess the spiritual blessings offered. Men must thirst for the waters of life and come to them, in order to partake of them; and men must come to Christ, that they may have life, in order to obtain it. Christ says, "All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." Coming to Christ signifies the same as believing in him. All the offers of the gospel are made to some holy exercises of heart; such as holy love, holy repentance, holy faith, holy submission, and all other holy affections. And if men exercise any of these holy affections, they are promised eternal life; but if they refuse to exercise holy affections, they are threatened with eternal death. Christ commanded his apostles, and through them all their successors in the ministry, to preach the gospel in this conditional language, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." Repentance and faith are the cardinal conditions, upon which eternal life is promised; and impenitence and unbelief are the cardinal conditions, upon which eternal death is threatened. This is agreeable to the solemn declaration of Christ. "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him." Lest the universal offers of mercy should be misunderstood and perverted, the gospel everywhere guards them with the solemn conditions of eternal life, or eternal death. Every offer of mercy in the gospel is inseparably connected with the promise of eternal life, upon the condition of accepting the offer, and with the threatening of eternal death, upon the condition of rejecting the offer. Hence the universal offers of pardoning mercy in the gospel afford no argument in favor of universal salvation, but an evidence next to demonstration, that some men will be damned.

4. Some draw an argument in favor of universal salvation from the universal goodness of mankind. They assert, that there is no such thing as a change of heart, by the renewing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit; and that it is an infallible mark of hypocrisy for one man to think or say, that he is any better at heart, than any other. They deny, that there is any essential

distinction between saints and sinners in this life. They hold, that all men are partly bad and partly good, and that none are totally depraved. If they can prove this, it is granted that they can fairly infer from it, that all men will be saved. For the gospel does certainly promise eternal life to all who truly love God, repent of sin, and believe in Christ, or have the least degree of saving grace. But can they prove, that there is no essential distinction between such true penitents and sincere believers, and the rest of mankind? Can they prove, that total depravity has not reigned in the hearts of all men, naturally, from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to this day? Christ taught the doctrine of total depravity. He said, that sinners have not the love of God in them, and that they have the same selfish and malignant spirit, that reigns in the heart of the great adversary. Paul taught, that all men are naturally dead in trespasses and in sins, and that they have a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be; so that they who are in the flesh cannot please God. It is unscriptural and absurd in the highest degree, to pretend to draw an argument in favor of universal salvation, from the false supposition of the universal and equal goodness of mankind.

5. Some argue, that all mankind will be saved, because they are all sufficiently punished in this life. This they consider as a very strong reason to prove universal salvation. They affirm that temporal punishment is all that sin deserves. They affirm that there is not a threatening in the Bible, respecting any future and eternal punishment of sinners. But all men of plain, common sense, who have read the Bible, and whose understanding has not been darkened by the blindness of the heart and the sophistry of seducers, know that God has plainly threatened future and eternal punishment to the finally impenitent and unbelievers. The law threatens eternal death to every impenitent transgressor of it. Christ abundantly taught the doctrine of future and eternal rewards and punishments. He taught this doctrine, when he said, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear *Him* who is able to destroy both *soul and body in hell.*" He taught this doctrine

when he said, "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." He taught this doctrine in the parable of the tares and the wheat; in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, and in the representation of the general judgment in the 25th of Matthew. After such plain and positive declarations and predictions of future and eternal rewards and punishments, none who pay due regard to the Bible, can believe that all men will be saved. Thus weak, impertinent and absurd, are the supposed strong reasons in favor of universal salvation.

The attention of the reader is now invited to the following inferences. 1. If no arguments can be drawn from the strong reasons, or fundamental principles, upon which the doctrine of universal salvation is founded, in favor of it; then no arguments can be drawn in favor of it, from any passages of Scripture, which have been or can be adduced to support it. All denominations of Christians endeavor to read the whole Bible into their scheme of doctrines, and especially the Universalists. They quote and apply a multitude of texts to prove that all men will be saved, and while they explain the passages they cite, according to their own false principles, they carry a great degree of plausibility to many people. But if the passages they adduce be rightly explained, according to the first and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, they would appear to have no pertinency or force at all. Let any passage of Scripture be explained according to the true meaning of God's universal goodness, as consisting in universal benevolence and limited complacence; or according to the true sense of the universal atonement of Christ; or according to the true sense of the universal offers of mercy to sinners; or according to the true sense of the universal and total depravity of mankind; or according to the true sense of the threatenings denounced against sinners in the gospel; and such a passage rightly explained could not afford the shadow of an argument in favor of universal salvation. And this is true of every passage in the Bible. All the numerous

texts that Universalists quote, they explain and apply according to their own false principles, and of course they misapply and pervert every text they adduce in support of their unreasonable and unscriptural sentiments. No doctrine can be proved, or refuted, by merely marshaling one class of texts against another, without explaining them according to some sound and acknowledged principle. Texts ought never to be adduced to explain and establish any first principles; but first principles are to be adduced to explain and establish the sense of every text of Scripture. It is easy to select particular passages, which without a true explanation, will appear to support the most absurd doctrine that ever was imbibed and propagated. The plain words of Christ, at the first sacrament, respecting the bread he brake, "This is my body," have been ten thousand times employed to prove the doctrine of transubstantiation, or the bodily presence of Christ at his table. But can these words prove the grossest absurdity in nature, that Christ's identical body can be actually present in ten thousand places at once? This is contrary to the reason and common sense of all mankind. It is just as absurd to suppose, that some texts in their true sense prove that all men will be saved; and that other texts in their true sense prove, that some men are now, and others will be separated from God and all good to all eternity. It is in vain to attempt to refute Universalists by quoting particular texts of Scripture, without explanation. The only way to refute them, is to refute their strong reasons or first principles, which they argue from. They can evade any text of Scripture, by explaining it according to their false principles. This is their dernier resort, when they meet with any plain Scripture in opposition to their favorite doctrine. They deny the force of all texts, which speak of the doctrine of election, the doctrine of reprobation, the doctrine of the general judgment, or of any other doctrine opposite to their own, by saying that all such doctrines are inconsistent with their sense of the *universal goodness of God*, or the universal atonement of Christ, or the universal goodness of mankind, or their universal punishment in this life. All their plausibility arises from their sophistry, which consists in reasoning right from false principles. That

they all mean to reason sophistically, I do not believe, nor mean to assert ; but I have no hesitation in asserting, that they do reason sophistically, and more sophistically than any other errorists that I am acquainted with. For their doctrine is more palpably and obviously false, than any other doctrine pretended to be found in the Bible.

2. If those who maintain, that all men will be saved, have no strong and conclusive reasons to support their opinion ; then those who maintain, that only a part of mankind will be saved, have strong and conclusive reasons to support their doctrine. The doctrine, that all men will be saved, is directly opposite to the doctrine, that only some men will be saved. If the doctrine of universal salvation be false, and founded upon false principles ; then the opposite doctrine, that only a part of mankind will be saved, is founded upon true and solid principles. Two directly opposite doctrines cannot both be true, but one must be true, and the other false. It has been made to appear sufficiently plain, perhaps, that no just and conclusive arguments can be drawn, either from reason, or from Scripture, to support the doctrine of universal salvation ; from which it necessarily follows, that just and conclusive arguments may be drawn from reason and Scripture, to support the doctrine, that only a part of mankind will be saved. Whatever reason has to say and Scripture has to say upon the subject, is in favor of the doctrine of future and eternal rewards and punishments. Reason says, that all impenitent sinners *deserve* eternal punishment, and that it is consistent with God's universal benevolence, to inflict an eternal punishment upon them. Reason says, that there is an essential difference between saints, who possess pure, disinterested benevolence, and sinners, who are wholly under the dominion of perfect selfishness ; and that these two classes of men ought to be forever separated ; the benevolent made happy, and the malevolent made miserable. Reason says, that no totally depraved sinners will ever choose to become benevolent, without a special divine influence upon their hearts ; and that God is under no obligation to grant them such a special divine influence ; and consequently that God may, consistently with his universal benevolence, renew one and not another, as an act of absolute sove-

reignty. And now all that Scripture says respecting these points, seems to confirm all the dictates of reason. Every doctrine and every passage of Scripture, according to its true sense, either directly or indirectly proves, that only a part of mankind will be saved. All reason and all Scripture is in favor of those, who maintain the doctrine of *universal* salvation ; or in favor of those, who maintain the doctrine of *limited* salvation. But Universalists themselves are sensible, that the whole current of Scripture is apparently against them, and for this reason, they exert all their powers, in conversation, in preaching, and in writing, to explain away the texts and refute the reasons, which oppose their doctrine. They never lay down principles and explain them, nor construe Scripture according to the dictates of reason. But those who hold to a limited salvation, lay down principles and explain them. They tell what they mean by God's benevolence, and what they mean by his love of complacence ; what they mean by total depravity ; what they mean by regeneration ; what they mean by election and reprobation, and what they mean by the terms of salvation. And having fixed these great and fundamental principles of the gospel, they can read the whole Bible in support of them, or in consistency with their doctrine of limited salvation. They do not set one text of Scripture against another, but explain every text agreeably to the great fundamental principles, which they have established and explained. There is no occasion of misconstruing and misapplying any passages of Scripture, in order to prove, that only a part of mankind will be saved ; or in order to refute every argument and every Scripture, that Universalists can bring to support their unscriptural and absurd sentiments. Their strong reasons, when brought to the test of solid principles, lose all their force, and leave them no infallible rule by which to construe apparently conflicting passages of Scripture. But those who maintain, that only a part of the human race will finally reach the kingdom of heaven, can easily construe Scripture in general in harmony with the doctrine they profess.

3. It appears from what has been said concerning the strong reasons, that are brought forth in support of universal salvation, that they destroy one another. If

of these reasons be true, the others are all impertinent and inconclusive. If it be true, that the universal goodness of God is inconsistent with his hating sinners for their sins, with his threatening to punish them for their sins in a future state, and with his actually punishing them forever ; then he must make them all eternally happy, without any regard to the atonement of Christ, without any regard to their universal goodness, and without any regard to their suffering in the present life. The representation, which Universalists give of the universal goodness of God, and the manner in which they reason from it, show that they all build their whole scheme upon it. For according to their reasonings from divine goodness, it must make all intelligent creatures forever happy, whether they are holy or unholy, guilty or innocent. What occasion, then, was there for the atonement of Christ, in order to save any of mankind from a punishment, that his universal goodness would not permit him to inflict ? According to their idea of the universal goodness of God, it is absurd to talk about either the need, or the benefit of Christ's atonement, for there was no need of it, and it does no good. It does not save men from future and eternal punishment, nor from temporal death, nor from temporal evils and calamities. They have but one strong reason, in their own view, in favor of universal salvation, and that is the universal goodness of God. Take this away from them, and they have not another reason left them, of the weight of a straw. Ask them whether they build their doctrine upon the universal goodness of God ; or upon the universal atonement of Christ ; or upon the universal offers of the gospel ; or upon the universal goodness of human nature ; or upon the punishments which God brings upon men in the present life ; and they are silent, and durst not answer distinctly. They are capable of seeing that these strong reasons clash, contradict, and destroy each other. It is fated to error to run crooked. False principles are as inconsistent with one another, as with truth. And when passages of Scripture are explained upon false principles, they are made to clash, to contradict, and destroy the force of each other. It is not for the want of pains, nor talents, that Universalists cannot make their strong rea-

sons unite and harmonize in the support of their doctrine. The truth is, all their strong reasons are false, and being false, cannot be made to appear consistent by any subtle reasonings, nor by any false glosses upon particular passages of Scripture. So that the plain and palpable inconsistency of the scheme of universal salvation, is a plain demonstration of its falsehood.

4. If Universalism be founded upon the false and inconsistent principles, that have been mentioned ; then it leads to the denial of all the fundamental principles and doctrines of the gospel. Accordingly we find, that Universalists do deny the doctrine of personal election, the doctrine of regeneration, the doctrine of conditions of salvation, and the doctrine of final separation of the righteous from the wicked, at the general judgment. These are certainly the cardinal doctrines of the gospel, and when these are denied, who can see that there is any *truth* or *importance* in the gospel ? Men are as certain of future and eternal happiness, *without* it, as *with* it. Though Universalists would not be pleased to be called Deists, yet they are Deists, to all intents and purposes ; and their doctrine leads directly to Deism, and the preaching of it makes more Deists, than Universalists, among their more discerning hearers. Their error is a great and essential error, because it tends to prevent men from performing the conditions, upon which the salvation of their souls is absolutely suspended. It assures them, that they need not repent, nor believe in Christ, nor exercise one holy or gracious affection, in order to escape the wrath to come, and enjoy everlasting life. They cannot fail of eternal happiness, let them say, or feel, or act as they will. Can there be a more licentious and dangerous doctrine than this ? I know they flatly deny this tendency. But their denial evinces their inconsistency, absurdity and delusion.

5. It appears from what has been said, that those who preach the false and dangerous doctrine of universal salvation, are extremely criminal. Their criminality is very great, whether they do, or do not know, that their doctrine is false. If they do not know that their doctrine is false, it is because they are voluntarily ignorant. If they did but impartially attend to the dictates of reason

and Scripture, they would know, that their doctrine is false. But if they do know that their doctrine is false, then they are tenfold more criminal in propagating it, and leading precious and immortal souls to endless perdition. They are severely condemned in Scripture, as strengthening the hands of the *wicked*, and making *sad the hearts of the righteous*. They are represented as under strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they might be damned. But where is the great criminality of preaching this doctrine, if it did not expose them to any temporal, or eternal punishment; and why should such false teachers be ranked among the most vile and guilty characters, described and condemned in the Bible? Or why should the prophets, and Christ, and the apostles, have been so bitterly and mortally opposed for preaching this doctrine, as the Universalists assert, that they did preach it? I never heard them answer this question, either in their conversation, or preaching, or publications, and I have read the writings of their most celebrated laymen and clergymen. The question must be gravelling and unanswerable, and among other things proves their doctrines to be false and dangerous.

6. If Universalists are highly criminal for teaching the false and dangerous doctrine of universal salvation, then it is unwise and criminal for any to go and hear them spread their fatal errors and corruptions. The wisest of men gives this wise and important caution against hearing false and corrupting teachers. "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth thee to err from the words of knowledge." It is very wrong for any to gratify an itching ear and vain curiosity, at the risk of fatal deception. And though some may imagine, that they are out of the reach of danger by hearing the sophistry of seducers; yet their example may lead others to hear and believe a lie to their eternal ruin. There is in every human heart a prepossession and bias towards error, and the most fatal error. It is unwise for any to trust in their own hearts, which are deceitful above all things, and presume upon their knowledge and integrity to discover and reject errors plausibly represented, and in their own nature agreeable to the depravity of the heart.

7. This subject shows the importance of understanding,

and being firmly established in the *first principles* of the oracles of God. Detached passages of Scripture can be of but little service in contending with Universalists, or any other heretics, without the knowledge of first principles, according to which all passages are to be explained. The knowledge of the first principles of all religion, will enable any persons to discover, to reject, and to refute all heretics. Nothing but sound principles are sufficient to refute unsound and false principles. It was the knowledge of the first principles of the gospel, that armed the apostles against all the errors, delusion, and sophistry of Jews and Greeks, and enabled them to pull down the strong holds of the arch deceiver, and all his deluded followers. And all who enjoy the gospel, need the same impregnable armor of the first and fundamental principles of religious truth. We ought to think, while we read the Bible, and compare all its declarations, promises, and threatenings, with some true and infallible principle. Those who neglect to take this course, will always be liable to be carried away with every wind of doctrine, and make shipwreck of their faith, and to be drowned in perdition.

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SINNERS WILFUL AND PERVERSE.



And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But Wisdom is justified of all her children.—Luke vii. 31—35.

If we ever find infinite wisdom apparently at a loss, it is when she would describe the unreasonableness and perverseness of sinners, or devise proper means to reclaim them. Thus we find her saying to God's ancient people, O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for thy goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. In a similar manner Christ here represents himself as at a loss how to describe the perverseness and obstinacy of his hearers. Whereunto, says he, shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? As it is, however, impossible, that the infinitely wise Saviour should ever be really at a loss, he immediately fixes upon a similitude, which strikingly illustrated their character and conduct. They are, says he, like children sitting in the market place, and saying to their fellows, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto

you, and ye have not wept. To see the force and appositeness of this comparison, it is necessary to recollect the manner, in which weddings and funerals were solemnized among the Jews. At their weddings, a procession was formed, preceded by musicians, playing cheerful tunes, and dancers, who accompanied and kept time to their music. At their funerals also they had mourners, who performed solemn and mournful airs, or uttered cries, lamentations, and other expressions of grief. These various ceremonies the Jewish children were accustomed to imitate in their amusements. Sometimes they played cheerful tunes, and rejoiced as at a marriage feast; at others, they uttered mournful sounds, and affected to weep, as at a funeral procession. Sometimes, however, children, who wished to amuse themselves in this manner, found their companions peevish and unwilling to join with them. If they piped and rejoiced, as at a wedding, these ill humored companions would not dance; if, to please them, they changed their strain, and mourned, as at a funeral, they would ~~not weep and lament~~. Hence they complained, as in our text, ~~that it was impossible to please them, they would neither do one thing nor another.~~ Similar to the temper and conduct of these perverse children was that of the Jews in the Saviour's time, and similar has been the conduct of sinners ever since. To trace this similarity, is my present design.

I. The companions of these perverse children employed various means to conquer their obstinacy and persuade them to join in their amusements. So God has employed a great variety of means to persuade sinners to embrace the gospel. He has sent judgments to subdue, and mercies to melt them; arguments to convince, and motives to persuade them; threatenings to terrify, and invitations to allure them. In different parts of his word he has exhibited divine truth in every possible variety of form. In one place it is presented plainly to the mind in the form of doctrines; in another, it is couched under the veil of some instructive and striking parable; in a third, it is presented to us in a garb of types and shadows; in a fourth, it is illustrated by the most beautiful figures; and, in a fifth, exemplified in some well drawn character, or interesting portion of history. In a word, he addresses

us, by turns, in language the most plain and simple, the most grand and commanding, the most pointed and energetic, the most sublime and beautiful, the most impressive and affecting, the most pathetic and melting. God and men, this world and the next, time and eternity, death and judgment, heaven and hell,—these rise successively to our view, portrayed in the most vivid colors, and exhibited in various forms, while the whole created universe is put in requisition to furnish images for the illustration of these awful realities; and the infinite wisdom of God himself is exerted, if I may so express it, to the utmost, in devising and employing the most suitable means to impress them upon our minds, and cause them to affect our hearts. Thus he has addressed himself, by turns, to our eyes and to our ears, to our understandings and consciences, to our imaginations and to our affections, to our hopes and to our fears; and caused divine truth to seek admission to our minds by every avenue, to try every possible way of access.

Corresponding to these various means, and to the different modes of instruction adopted in his word, are the various gifts and qualifications, with which he furnishes those, who are sent as his ambassadors to men. As he knows the different tastes and dispositions of men, and the modes of address best adapted to convince and persuade them, he endues his messengers with a great diversity of gifts, so that, by one or another of them, every class of hearers may be gratified. He sends some ministers, who are sons of thunder, well qualified to awaken, rouse, and convince the careless; while others, like Barnabas, are sons of consolation, and fitted to comfort the feeble minded and support the weak. Some he furnishes with clear, penetrating minds, and strong reasoning powers, that they may perspicuously state, and ably defend the doctrines of revelation, answer objections, and, by sound arguments, convince the gainsayers. To others he gives warm feelings and lively imaginations, that they may urge divine truth upon the hearts and consciences of their hearers, in a more forcible, impassioned and impressive manner. On a third class he bestows the faculty of presenting truth to the mind in a mild, insinuating, persuasive way, by which it steals into and melts

the heart, descending upon it like the dews of heaven, or silent showers, which water the earth. Thus, how diversified soever are the tastes and dispositions of men, all may, in turn, be gratified, in consequence of the variety of ministerial gifts, which God employs for the conversion of sinners and the edification of his church. Thus the healing medicine of divine truth is presented to the vitiated palates of sinners in every possible variety of form ; or to allude to the comparison in our text, thus do different ministers address their hearers in different strains, sometimes endeavoring to allure them to embrace the gospel, by comparing it to a marriage feast ; and, at others, attempting to terrify them to fly to it, by bringing into view the solemnities of death, and the awful scenes which follow it.

II. Notwithstanding the different means employed with these perverse children, they would not be prevailed upon to comply with the wishes of their companions. We have piped unto you, say they, but ye have not danced ; we have mourned unto you, but ye have not lamented. Precisely similar is the conduct of impenitent sinners. Notwithstanding the great variety of means, which God employs to persuade them to embrace the gospel ; and though, as our Saviour teaches us, these means are no less adapted to produce the effect than a message from the dead, yet still they perversely refuse to comply. Reason with them—they will not be convinced ; set motives before them—they will not be persuaded ; address their hearts—they will not be affected ; appeal to their consciences—they will not feel guilty ; attempt to excite their fears—they will not be alarmed ; endeavor to allure them to Christ by promises and invitations—they will not come. Beseech them, weep over them, expostulate with them in the most affectionate and pathetic manner ; set good and evil, life and death, hell and heaven, judgment and eternity before them in every form—they make light of all, and go their ways, one to his farm, and another to his merchandize. In vain have prophets prophesied ; in vain have apostles preached ; in vain have angels descended from heaven ; in vain has the Son of God appeared on earth, and spoken as never man spake ; in vain has the eternal Father proclaimed from heaven,

This is my beloved Son, hear ye him :—still sinners will not hear, they will not come to Christ for life, they will neglect the great salvation of the gospel. Thus it always has been, thus it still is, and thus it always will be, while the heart remains what it is, and almighty grace is not exerted to subdue it.

III. The reason, why these perverse children could not be persuaded to comply with the wishes of their companions, was, that they were out of humor, or, for some other reason, felt indisposed to gratify them. Similar is the reason, why sinners will not be persuaded to embrace the gospel, by all the means which God employs for this purpose. They do not come to Christ for life, because they will not. Their proud, selfish hearts, are full of enmity and opposition to God, and therefore they will not be reconciled. It is the gospel itself, which they dislike; and, therefore, how various soever may be the forms, in which it is presented, how clear soever the light, in which it is displayed, they still reject it. It is because I speak the truth, says our Saviour, that ye believe me not. This, however, sinners are, by no means, willing to acknowledge. They are afraid to confess, even to themselves, that it is hatred of the truth alone, which prevents them from embracing it. They, therefore, attempt to excuse themselves, by imputing their rejection of the gospel to some other cause; and to no cause do they impute it more frequently, than to the faults of its professors, or to something in the manner or conduct of those, who preach it. Thus, we learn from our text, did the Jews. John Baptist came neither eating, nor drinking; that is, he lived in the most frugal, abstemious manner, and, as a preacher of repentance, was reserved in his deportment, and severe in his rebukes. Hence they said, He hath a devil; that is, he is a morose, visionary, melancholy man, little better than one distracted, who knows not what he says. Our Saviour, on the contrary, came eating and drinking; he associated with men in an affable, familiar manner, with a view to instruct them, and for the same benevolent purpose visited and conversed with the most abandoned characters. His perverse hearers then changed their tone, and cried, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. In ■

similar manner do sinners at the present day, attempt to conceal and excuse their opposition to the gospel. If professors of religion and its ministers live as they ought, soberly, righteously, and godly, they are said to be too rigid, superstitious, righteous overmuch. If, on the contrary, they are of a more cheerful, social turn, the world immediately exclaims, These are your professors, your saints; but in what respect do they differ from others? If they are punctual in attending public and private meetings for religious worship, spend much time in prayer, and devote a considerable portion of their property to charitable and religious purposes, it is immediately said, that religion makes men idle and negligent of their families. If, on the other hand, they are industrious, frugal, and attentive to business, they are no less quickly accused of loving the world as well as their neighbors, who make no pretensions to religion. If a minister reasons with his hearers in a cool, dispassionate manner, and labors to convince their understandings, he is accused of being dry and formal in his preaching, or of not believing what he says. If another preaches in a more lively, animated strain, clearly proclaims the terrors of the Lord, and warns his hearers to fly from the wrath to come, he is charged with endeavoring to work on men's passions, and to frighten them into religion. If he insists much on the doctrines of Christianity, the necessity of faith, and the impossibility of being justified by our own works, he is accused of undervaluing morality, and representing the practice of good works as needless. If, on the other hand, he clearly exhibits the pure morality of the gospel, inculcates holiness of heart and life, and states the dreadful consequences of neglecting it, he is charged with driving men to despair by unreasonable strictness and severity. Thus in almost innumerable ways men ascribe their neglect of the gospel to the faults of its professors, or to something in the manner, in which it is preached, and thus harden themselves and others in unbelief.

But though they may thus deceive themselves, they cannot deceive God. He knows and has said, that the true reason of their rejecting it is, that they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to

the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. That this is the case, is evident from men's conduct in other respects. Think not, however, my friends, that, in mentioning these things, we are indulging a spirit of recrimination or complaint. It is not for our own sakes, that we make these remarks,—for it is of very little consequence what men may say of us,—but for your sakes. It is necessary to your conversion, that you should know what are the true causes of your rejecting the gospel; for until you know these, you will never embrace it. It is also necessary for God's glory, that the cause should evidently appear to be the obstinacy of sinners, and not any deficiency in the means employed by him for their conversion. Whether you will believe this or not, it is most certainly the truth, and you will one day be convinced that it is. Meanwhile, God has not left himself without witnesses to clear his character, and the honor of his gospel, from the groundless aspersions of sinners,—witnesses, which justify him before an ungodly world; for our Saviour assures us in the conclusion of this parable; that, however sinners may reject the gospel, and condemn the manner, in which it is preached, still, wisdom is justified of all her children. By wisdom, is here meant, either God himself, or the gospel, with the means which he employs for its promulgation. He is the only wise God, and the gospel is styled his hidden wisdom, or the wisdom of God in a mystery; while by the means, which he employs to render it successful in building up his church, his manifold wisdom, we are told, is displayed. By the children of wisdom, are intended the children of God, or in other words, those who yield to the force of his appointed means and cordially embrace the gospel. By all such, God, and his ways, are justified, and the wisdom of all his proceedings is readily acknowledged. They admire, love, and adore him, for the infinite wisdom, as well as goodness, which appears in the gospel plan of salvation; and, while they contemplate it, exclaim with the apostle, O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Little less do they admire the wisdom and goodness of God, as displayed in the means, which he employs to promote the success of the gospel; and in the fullness,

richness, and variety of the Scriptures, and in the diversity of gifts bestowed on his ministering servants. And, while they acknowledge, that nothing but his all-conquering grace could have rendered these means efficacious to conquer their own stubborn hearts, and humbly cry, Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name be the glory,—they clearly see and unanimously testify, that the only reason, why sinners do not embrace the gospel, is their hatred of the truth, and their opposition to God. Thus wisdom is justified of all her children; and this is the only encouragement, which ministers have to preach the gospel. They know, that it always has been, and that it always will be, foolishness to them that perish; and that by all such they shall themselves be considered as little better than fools and babblers; for if men have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they thus call those of his household. But they also know, that there are some, though, alas, too few, who are the children of wisdom; and that to them the preaching of the cross will always be the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation. Some such, I desire to bless God, there are in this assembly; some, who receive the truth in the love of it; some, who have felt its transforming, life-giving power; some, who, like all the children of wisdom, justify their heavenly Father and condemn themselves. It is, my Christian friends, indeed a delightful employment to preach to you the unsearchable riches of Christ; for you can, in some measure, feel their worth. It is pleasant to expatiate to you on his glories and beauties; for you have eyes to discern, and hearts to feel them. It is pleasant to invite you to the gospel feast; for you have a disposition to comply. When we display the sufferings of your crucified Lord, and the sins which occasioned them, you are ready to *mourn with us* in godly sorrow and contrition of heart. And when in more cheerful strains we proclaim the happy consequences of his sufferings, and blow the trumpet, whose silver sounds are pardon, peace, and salvation, for dying men, you are equally ready to rejoice. In a word, your hearts are in unison with the gospel harp; when we strike its golden strings, your feelings vibrate to every touch; and you can accompany us,

through its whole compass of sound, from the low notes of pious grief and penitential sorrow, up to the high thrilling tones of enraptured gratitude, love, and praise, which almost accord with the harps of the redeemed before the throne. Yes, you have learned that new song, which none can learn, but those who are redeemed from the earth; that song, which is sung in heaven, which will be new to all eternity; and most happy and highly honored do I think myself, in being permitted to lead your choir on earth, and to hope that we shall sing it together in the full choir of the redeemed above. It is the greatest of my present supports and consolations, to see in you a proof, that my labors are not altogether in vain. O, then, my brethren, my fellow travellers to heaven, my fellow heirs of its glories! strive to obtain hearts more and more perfectly attuned to the gospel harp; more habitually disposed to vibrate to its celestial sounds. Daily practice the song of the redeemed, and cause the notes of heaven to be heard on earth. Strive, by adorning the doctrine of God, your Saviour, to justify the wisdom, which reveals it, and to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. And if any word I have ever spoken has been blessed to excite godly sorrow or religious feelings in your breasts, let me beseech you, in return, to pray for me, that I may be better furnished with the necessary qualifications for the ministry; that I may never utter an uncertain sound, and that, when I call sinners *to mourn* for their sins, or *to rejoice* in a Saviour, God's grace may render the call effectual.

Would to God, my friends, we could believe, that the class now addressed, included all in this assembly. But melancholy experience constrains us to believe, that the comparison in our text applies to many present, no less exactly than it did to the Jews. As promising means, as God employed to effect their conversion, have been employed with you. Indeed you enjoy far greater advantages than they did. They had only the Old Testament. You, in addition to that, enjoy the New. They were stumbled and perplexed by the mean circumstances, in which Christ appeared, so different from what they expected. To you the reasons of his appearing in this manner, are fully explained. They rejected the Sun of

Righteousness, when he first rose, and when his beams were comparatively feeble; you reject him, while shining in meridian splendor, and after his beams have blessed the nations for more than eighteen hundred years, diffusing light and happiness, wherever they come. They only *heard* the predictions of Christ; you have witnessed their exact fulfilment. They refused to hear Christ, while he spake on earth; you turn away your ears now he speaks from heaven. They refused to believe the testimony of prophets and apostles; you reject, not only their testimony, but that of all the multitudes of Christ's ministers, who have preached ever since. It is not surprising, therefore, that you should refuse to believe my testimony. I have exerted, to the utmost, the abilities God has given me; in his name, I have, by turns, reasoned and persuaded, exhorted and entreated, invited and threatened, warned and promised, prayed and wept,—but to no purpose. I have set before you, all that is awful and all that is amiable, all that is alarming and all that is alluring, but without effect. I have sounded the brazen trumpet of the law, but you have not mourned. I have blown the silver trumpet of the gospel, but you have not rejoiced. Other and more able ministers have also addressed you. You have, from this pulpit, heard, at different times, cogent reasoners, eloquent speakers, and impressive, persuasive preachers, endeavoring to prevail with you to embrace the gospel. But all has been vain, and with respect to many of you, I fear, worse than in vain. My labors have now apparently less effect upon many of you than ever. Where they once made some impression, they now pass like water over a rock; where they once convinced, they now only irritate; where I was once received with affection, I am now considered as an enemy, because I tell you the truth. My friends—if, to labor, and watch, and pray for your salvation, with a heart broken with apprehension and tortured with anxiety, lest you should fail of it; if, to goad on a worn out body and jaded mind to exertions in your behalf, under which nature sinks, and life becomes a burden; if, to desire your conversion more than riches, more than reputation, more than health, more than life,—if these things are marks of an enemy, then I am your enemy, and such an enemy, I trust, I

shall continue to be to my last breath. In fact, if I except the tempter and the world, you have no enemies but yourselves. God, and Christ, and his servants, are your friends, or would be, if you would permit them; but, alas, you will not. Often would they have gathered you, but ye would not. A deep rooted, unconquerable aversion to what you think the strictness of Christ's regulations, frustrates all the endeavors of your friends to save you. You know, that religion is important, you are convinced that it should be attended to; but you have no heart to it, you have no love for it, and, therefore, as you sometimes confess, you cannot give your minds to it. My friends, what will be the end of this? You have seen its end in the Jews. You know how terribly they were destroyed for neglecting Christ; and if they escaped not, who refused him, when he spake on earth, much more shall not ye escape, if ye turn from him who addresses you from heaven. Once more, then, we conjure you by every thing sacred and every thing dear, by every thing dreadful and every thing desirable, to renounce your unreasonable opposition, and yield yourselves the willing servants of Christ.

But there is also a third class of persons in this assembly, who must be addressed, though we hardly know in what manner to address them. It is composed of such as resemble the son in the parable, who, when his father said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard, immediately replied, I go, sir, but went not. When we speak to these persons in an affecting, mournful manner, and bring to their view the solemnities of death, judgment, and eternity, they seem ready to weep. And when we tell them of the goodness of God, the love of Christ, and the happiness of those, who come to his marriage-feast, they are equally ready to rejoice, and seem to desire nothing so much as religion. But in a week, or perhaps in a day, they are the same as before. That there are many such among us, is evident from recent circumstances. We, a short time since, as you probably recollect, invited all, who considered religion as the one thing needful, and who meant to pursue it as such, to meet us at a certain place. We particularly requested, that none would attend, who had not made up their minds on the subject,

who were not fully determined to persevere. In consequence of this invitation nearly one hundred persons assembled. I rejoiced at the sight, and immediately wrote to a society, that wished me to make a missionary tour, that, in consequence of the serious attention, that existed among my people, I could not leave them.—But where now are those, who thus pledged themselves to God, and to each other, and to me, that they would pursue religion? Alas! I fear, that their goodness has been as the morning cloud and early dew, that soon pass away. That *I* should not know what to say to such persons, is not surprising, since, as I observed at the commencement of this discourse, God himself seems as if at a loss what to do with them. As an ancient writer observes, they are, by turns, a minister's comforters and tormentors. They excite his expectations to-day, but they disappoint him most painfully to-morrow. Let them not think, however, that their temporary convictions will prevent them from being numbered among the characters described in our text. Let them not flatter themselves, that their conversion is rendered more probable by these transitory impressions. Every resistance of conviction renders such an event more hopeless.

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LOVE THYSELF
AND
THY NEIGHBOR.



THE spirit of that religion which the gospel inculcates, is a spirit of benevolence. In this consists the moral glory of the universe. It is this spirit that fulfils the law of God, and comprises, in its various operations, all that Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles have said, descriptive of the faith and practice of a Christian. Into this spirit, it is one great design of the gospel to form men. Hence, said the Saviour to one who asked him, "Which is the great commandment in the law? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

To illustrate the latter of these commands is the object of this tract. In doing this, it is necessary to show,—how we should love ourselves, and how we should love our neighbors.

1. *How should we love ourselves?*

It is our duty to feel a regard for our own personal interest. Indeed, the love of happiness, and the dread of misery are inseparable from our nature. It is right that we should be influenced by the motive of personal enjoyment and suffering.

Happiness is a good in itself, and it is right that we should desire its enjoyment. We are nowhere required to feel a spirit of indifference with regard to our own interest. Does the command of God bind us to look with feelings of compassion upon our fellow men, and, by every practicable measure, to do them good? It imposes on us the same obligation with respect to ourselves. Has the benevolent Parent of the human family placed, within

our attainment, a degree of good which has no end, and no limits but our capacities for enjoyment; then it is right that we should desire the possession of that good.

But, it will be asked, do not all mankind love themselves, and desire to secure their everlasting happiness? Yes. All men, as soon as they commence their moral existence, are supremely influenced by a regard to their own private interest. "Lovers of their own selves," is a compendious description of the men of this world. There is no being in the universe that holds so high a place in their affections as self. There is no object in the universe they would not subordinate to the purposes of personal advancement. Give natural men the power, and place them in circumstances adapted to give full expression to the selfishness of their hearts, and they would put a final end to all the movements of the divine benevolence, to lay a foundation, on which to rear a kingdom for themselves. This is no fanciful description of human depravity. Multitudes have acknowledged it from their own painful experience. It is the very disposition that constitutes our common apostacy from God. It is the source of all the opposition, which, in this world of rebellion, is cherished and manifested towards the character, purposes, and sovereign agency of a God of infinite benevolence. Banish this spirit from the bosoms of men, and with one united voice, would they exclaim, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." This spirit of inordinate self-esteem, both the Bible, and conscience uniformly condemn. It is direct opposition to the law of God, and the prolific source of all those crimes, that have brought down the curse of God on this troubled earth. Such a regard for our own interest, we are not at liberty to cherish a single moment. It is unreasonable and criminal self-exaltation, and involves an utter renunciation of the authority of God. It will be inquired then, in what manner are we to regard our own happiness? I answer, with a truly impartial or benevolent affection. As the creatures of God, capable of conformity to him in holiness, and of endless happiness in his presence, and service; and also of forfeiting his favor, and of suffering his endless displeasure, we are to value our interest according to its apparent worth in the scale of being.

As rational creatures, we are bound to seek our own good. This immense, and everlasting interest is, in a sense, committed to us; and the awful event of rising to heaven or sinking to hell, will be just according to the disposition of our hearts. God cannot bestow on us the blessedness of his holy kingdom, in opposition to our choice. Equally impossible is it for us, with hearts filled with his love, to feel the sensations of those who are driven away from his presence.

But though our happiness is an object of so much importance, and is to be sought with so much solicitude, still it is not the only object of importance. Nor are we at liberty so to magnify our own interest, as to be ready to give up the general interests of the universe, and grasp at our own happiness as a matter of supreme value. Such self-regard is, in its very nature, malignity against the general good. Happiness is not the more important, because *we* are capable of enjoying it. Nor is evil the more to be deprecated, because *we* are capable of suffering it. The divine law does not allow us to seek our good merely because it is *ours*, but because it is *a good in itself*. It is suitable that we should feel self-respect in proportion to our worth. But, to love ourselves in a greater degree, is contrary to the great law of love. God has made no creatures simply on their own account. Nor does he permit us to have any interest, separate from the general interests of the universe. It is the dictate, as well of reason as of the Scriptures, that we should contemplate ourselves as creatures, capable of happiness and misery, and that, in subordination to the more important concerns of the universe, we should desire deliverance from sin, and from punishment; that we should rely upon the grace of God to make us holy as he is holy; to raise our bodies from the grave, to perfect our redemption; and, finally, to admit us to the everlasting joys of his kingdom. I say, we should desire these unspeakable blessings, in subordination to the more important concerns of the universe. Our good will towards ourselves should correspond with the divine benevolence towards us. God is not indifferent to our interest. The course of his providence, together with the declarations of his word, manifests a tender regard for the good of his

creatures, even of his incorrigible foes. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." But still, God regards the interests of beings, collectively considered, as of more importance than the good of a single individual. Nothing can be more suitable, than that we should put the same estimate upon our interest, that God puts upon it, and with him, regard the good of the intelligent system, with a deeper solicitude, than our own happiness. With such impartiality should we love ourselves.

2. How should we love our neighbors?

All our fellow creatures are our neighbors; and the manner, in which we should regard them, will be easily seen from what has been said respecting the affection we should cherish for ourselves. Ought we to seek our own good, because, as rational creatures, we are capable of happiness and misery? then we ought to love others in the same manner. Ought we to love ourselves according to our apparent worth in the scale of being? in the same manner should we love our neighbors. It is the dictate of reason, that we should feel as impartially towards them, as towards ourselves. And it is also the dictate of reason, that we should regard the eternal welfare, both of ourselves, and others, with a deeper, and more permanent solicitude, than we are accustomed to feel.

Contemplate the value of a soul. It is a sensitive, intelligent being; capable of endless progression in knowledge, and holiness, and happiness. In proportion as it is capable of contemplating the character of God, the principles and ends of his government, is it capable of rational and holy enjoyment. The soul is immortal. Look onward, as far as numbers can compute, or the mind conceive. The soul will then exist, will be susceptible of joy, or grief unutterable; and will be no nearer a termination than at this moment. When these heavens shall have passed away, and this world been destroyed, the soul will pursue its endless course, and contemplate the scenes that are before it, with songs of joy, or wailings of despair. And is it so, that such a destination awaits every individual? In heaven, all the truly benevolent will find a permanent habitation. There will they

see him, who, by his blood, has redeemed them, be filled with his love, and enraptured with ever brightening visions of his glory. But oh! those who are his enemies, and who shall be found such, on the day of final account, will be driven away into everlasting punishment, wholly unreconciled to that justice, which they will see glorified in their destruction.

It is in the light of eternity alone, that we can see the value of a soul—the real worth of an immortal being. Not till we stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and hear him announce to countless myriads, fearfully and forever separated, “Come, ye blessed, and depart, ye cursed,” shall we adequately estimate the worth of a soul.

Every rational creature is capable of being the voluntary instrument of promoting the declarative glory of God, and of advancing the good of beings around him, and is destined to an endless state of happiness or misery beyond the grave. In such a point of view should we contemplate our fellow-men. They should be the objects of a solicitude, proportionate to their worth. I can see no reason why we should not as *sincerely*, and as *impartially*, seek their good as our own. Every rational being on the globe, whether learned or ignorant, civilized or savage, is a proper object of our regard. And no reason can be assigned, why we should not as sincerely desire his good as our own; why we should consider our particular connections as being more properly the objects of our solicitude, than those immortal beings that dwell in the most distant part of the world. A truly benevolent person will as really desire the present, and future happiness of a soul in India, as he will desire his own happiness, or the happiness of his most intimate connections. I do not say that he will feel as strong desires for the salvation of that soul, as for that of his own, or of his more immediate associates; but the only reason I can see, why he should not, is, he is not capable of so lively a view of the worth of that soul, as of his own, and of those with whom he is more nearly connected. Nor would I suggest, that we are to employ no more means to secure our own salvation, and the salvation of our particular connections, than we are to employ to save persons in a distant land. Peculiar duties devolve upon us

with regard to ourselves, and with regard to those with whom we are associated—duties which result from the peculiar situation in which Providence has placed us, and not from the consideration that our souls, or the souls of our friends, are of more importance than the souls of other immortal beings. If we are to labor more for our own good, than for the good of another, it does not follow that we are to regard our interest as of more importance than his.

It is because he possesses more real excellence, than all other beings united, that Jesus Christ has declared, “He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me;” and that he has enjoined on us, unlimited self-denial, with a view to promote the greater interests of his kingdom, as indispensable to membership in his family. It is solely on account of his infinite natural and moral perfection, that we are under obligation to subordinate all things to his glory. The divine law, which binds us in all our affections to be impartial, is founded in the nature of things, and is most reasonable.

If my happiness is not of greater worth than yours, it must be selfish, in me, to love myself more than I love you. If you love yourself more intensely than you love a fellow creature, whose worth is evidently equal to your own, you do not love him as you love yourself, nor, as in an exchange of circumstances, you would wish him to love you. In describing the wisdom that is from above, the apostle James says, “It is without partiality.” But how does it appear that you are impartial in your affections, if you do not love your neighbor as intensely as you love yourself, when his happiness appears to be worth as much as your own. To that impartial, universal good will, which seeks the happiness of all sensitive beings in proportion to their apparent worth, I can see no objection which is not reducible to selfishness. The sentiment, that we are under obligation to cherish, and to express the same impartial affection for others, that we should feel for ourselves, must approve itself to every unprejudiced mind. He that possesses true benevolence, will feel a supreme regard for God, on account of his supreme worth, and will commit all creatures into his hands, to be so disposed of as will best promote the general good.

This subject suggests several reflections.

1. *The religion inculcated in the gospel is disinterested.*

Love to universal being is the fulfilling of the law of God. It comprehends, in its various operations, all true Christian obedience. All the duties that we owe to God, to our fellow men, and to ourselves, are comprised in love. And this love is disinterested. By disinterested love, it is not meant that the subject of it has no regard for his own interest; but that he regards the good of others, as impartially as he does his own. In the exercise of holy love, he does not contemplate himself, as self merely, but as a creature of God, capable of happiness and misery; and as such he contemplates others. Does he desire to be conformed to God, and prepared for the holy employments and happiness of heaven? He has the same desires in reference to others. Does he feel willing that all his fellow creatures should be placed in such circumstances, as will best subserve the purposes of Him who made them? Does he regard the happiness of creatures, collectively considered, with a deeper solicitude than the good of a single individual? He feels the same impartiality with respect to the disposal of his own interest. To estimate personal good, according to its value; to rejoice that all creatures are at the disposal of infinite wisdom and goodness; to feel stronger desires for the general interests of the universe, than for personal interest,—is to be disinterested. The general good, comprehending the fullest exhibition of the divine glory, and the highest possible sum of holiness and happiness among rational beings, is the object of holy love. And to this object, a person truly disinterested, will hold all things in subordination. He considers himself but an atom in the scale of being, and cordially desires that God would make such use of him as will be most for the glory of his name. He rejoices that the allotment of every creature depends on the will of God. He contemplates the penalty of the divine law, in its application to himself, with the same feelings of approbation, as in its application to his neighbor. It is the very nature of impartiality to be willing to place ourselves, where we should be willing to place our neighbors, other things being equal. This is what I

mean by disinterestedness; and if the sentiment is not true, I see not how it is possible to obey the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

2. *True love forms an amiable character.*

It is the pure, impartial benevolence of Moses, of Abraham, and of the apostle Paul, that attaches such a loveliness to their characters. It is the disinterested love which the Lord Jesus Christ expressed in coming into this sinful world to suffer, and die on the cross for his enemies, which gives such a beauty to his character, and presents him to our view, as a pattern so worthy of imitation. A man, in the exercise of true love, gives up all those interests which lay nearest the selfish heart, that the highest good of the universe may be secured. The spontaneous language of his heart, when his eye catches a view of the glory of God, is, "Father, glorify thy name." He feels the same kindly affection for his fellow creatures which he feels for himself. Hence, in the exercise of holy love, a man neglects no duty to God, or his fellow beings. He will yield universal obedience to the divine commands. Such love would lead ministers and people, rulers and subjects, parents and children, masters and servants, to a conscientious discharge of all the duties involved in the several relations which they sustain. It would lead the rich, so far as is practicable, to relieve the poor; and dispose those who enjoy the gospel, civil government, rational liberty, and social happiness, to extend these invaluable blessings as far as possible. It would be morally impossible, that, in the exercise of true love, one portion of the human race should oppress and enslave another portion, or should neglect any practicable measure, by which the amount of human happiness might be augmented. Those, whose bosoms have been warmed with disinterested love, have, in all ages, been the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The characters of Brainerd, of Howard, of Buchanan, and of Martyn, will live in the recollection of the church, and will be contemplated with admiring gratitude to the latest age.

3. *As far as the gospel prevails, its influence upon the best interests of mankind must be salutary.*

When we consider the nature of selfishness, we cease to wonder that the history of this world, in all ages, is

little else than a record of injustice, of fraud, of violence, and of misery. These are the legitimate fruit of that spirit which has dominion over natural men. The circumstances of mankind have been different. Their habits and their religions have varied. One age has been marked by extreme ignorance, another by the light of science; but, in all ages, and in all conditions, mankind have exhibited the most incontestible evidence of the alienation of their hearts from God.

But as far as the gospel prevails, and its spirit is cherished, men will be disposed to lay the interests of others in an even balance with their own. Hence its influence upon the peace and happiness of mankind must be salutary. There can be no unhappy clashing of interests in a community, where a spirit of disinterestedness becomes a prevailing excitement to action. The spirit of the gospel is a spirit of justice. It is good will. It takes delight in bestowing a favor on him that dwells in the humblest cottage, and even upon an enemy; or it expands itself to all sensitive beings within the compass of its perception. Such a spirit diffused through a community would make them all feel that they have a common interest, and dispose them to seek the greatest advancement of that interest. Says Wilberforce, "It resembles majestic rivers that are poured from an unfailing source. They begin by dispensing comfort to every cottage by which they pass. In their further progress they unite kingdoms. At length they pour themselves into the ocean, where, changing their name but not their nature, they visit distant nations, and spread throughout the world the tide of their beneficence." Such is the spirit which constitutes the glory of God. "God is love." He is pure, impartial, universal good will. The same spirit all holy beings possess. Love is the bond by which they are held together, and all their efforts are directed to the same ultimate end. They all feel interested in the same objects, and derive their blessedness from the same source. There must be perfect union, and perfect blessedness among those who love each other as themselves. Let this spirit have its practical influence among mankind, and no root of bitterness can ever spring up to trouble them.

The direct tendency of the gospel is to conform the heart and life to the will of God. Fix your eye upon that man who possesses the spirit of the gospel, and you will see something more than benevolence in theory; the very thing itself will be exemplified in his public and private conduct. Everything belonging to time and sense will appear subordinated to what pertains to the glory of God and the advancement of his cause. He who feels the spirit of the gospel, will manifest a paramount regard to the will of God, whatever personal losses he may be called to sustain, or whatever scoffs he may endure as the consequence. Whatsoever thing is lovely and of good report; if there be any virtue, or any praise, the gospel tends to produce it. Are men in a state of ruinous alienation from God? Do they stand condemned by his law as transgressors? It is the gospel only that can redeem them. It is this, only, that by destroying the power of sin in the heart, can restore men to the favor, and prepare them for the service and enjoyment of God.

4. *It is the spirit of true benevolence which will give rise to the great and persevering efforts which are requisite to the universal spread of the gospel.*

That the gospel will spread over the face of the whole world, there is no room to doubt. For it is written, "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas." John in the spirit of prophecy writes, "I saw an angel fly through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." It is said, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." By Daniel it is said, "The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." By these prophetic declarations we are assured, that the gospel will spread, and exert its proper influence among the nations of the earth. But, since the gospel is to be extended by human instrumentality, it needs but a small acquaintance with the present state of the nations of the

earth, to foresee, that the predictions of the Bible on this subject, cannot be fulfilled without great and persevering effort on the part of the church. Satan, who is called the god of this world, has hitherto deluded most of the nations, and is still successful in turning them away from the service and favor of God. Far the greater portion of mankind are led captive by him at his will. In what heathenish superstition and wickedness, are four hundred millions involved ! Half as many Jews and Mohammedans are sunk, if possible, into a more hopeless condition. And what multitudes, in those portions of the earth, on which the light of the gospel has shined, and in which its wells of salvation have been opened, are still ignorant of its saving power. A moral darkness covers the earth. To dissipate this darkness, to chase away the delusions of man, to counteract this widely extended influence of Satan, to deliver a world from the dominion of ignorance and sin, by bringing them to the knowledge, and love, and enjoyment of the living and true God, requires a vast system of means carried forward by a spirit of holy, untiring benevolence.

5. *The truly benevolent cannot but contemplate with gratitude the indications in divine Providence, of the speedy and universal extension of the gospel.*

The means which are now in operation, have a favorable aspect in regard to the spread of the gospel, and the deliverance of the nations from the bondage of sin and Satan. The establishment of numerous Missionary Societies, Bible Societies, Education Societies, Tract Societies, the means employed to rend the vail from the minds of the Jews, to put an end to slavery, together with the large accessions that are made to the churches, are among the most prominent indications in divine Providence, that,

“ Six thousand years of sorrow, have well nigh
Fulfilled their tardy and disastrous course
Over a sinful world ; and what remains
Of this tempestuous state of human things
Is merely as the working of a sea
Before a calm that rocks itself to rest.”

Who will not rejoice, that wherever man resides, thither, by human agency, the blessings of redemption,

by the blood of Jesus Christ, are to be extended. Let us not forget, however, that the means employed in this enterprize of benevolence, have no independent efficiency; that it is not to be supposed they will overcome the ignorance, and prejudice, and enmity of the human heart, by their own power. "Not by might, nor by power, but my Spirit, saith the Lord." Here is revealed the only basis of our hopes, in regard to the triumph of the gospel. How soon would the benevolent operations of this distinguished age languish, and come to nothing, were it not that they stand in connection with an invisible power, that is able to overcome the strongest prejudice, and soften the most obdurate heart? How surely, would the millions of the human race, remain in delusion and wickedness, and fall into endless ruin? But the promise of God, that the whole earth shall be filled with his glory, together with the expression of his pleasure, that his promise shall be fulfilled by human instrumentality, is a sufficient foundation for the fullest confidence, that these plans of benevolence shall not languish, but increase yet more and more; and that, ere long, God will display "the riches of his glory, and the exceeding riches of his grace," in restraining the aboundings of wickedness and misery, and in preparing a world of rebels for his praise.

"Oh scenes surpassing fable, and yet true;
Scenes of accomplished bliss! which who can see,
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel
His soul refreshed with foretaste of the joy."

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THE PRAYER OF FAITH.



PRAYER is an unspeakable privilege. By it imperfect men are permitted to have power with God, and to exert a prevailing influence in obtaining blessings for themselves and for their fellow men. The instances of this, recorded in the holy Scriptures, are numerous, and full of encouragement to Christians. But it is not every prayer, so called, that is acceptable with God. The prayers of the wicked are an abomination. It is essential to right prayer that it be made in faith; not only faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom alone sinful men can have access to the Father, but faith in God, an unwavering confidence in him. "Let him ask *in faith*, nothing wavering." It becomes, then, an inquiry of great importance, What is the faith necessary to prevailing prayer? As different answers have been given to this inquiry, and as a mistake on this subject must be one of great magnitude, and might lead to other mistakes affecting the foundation of the whole Christian system, it is the object of the writer of this Tract to explain what is the faith necessary to prevailing prayer, and to point out some mistakes into which he thinks many are in danger of falling.

The Lord Jesus was pleased to represent the readiness of our Heavenly Father to hear and answer the prayers of his people, by the readiness of an earthly parent to give good things to his children, when they ask him. The comparison here instituted is full of instruction. Dutiful and affectionate children, in going to a wise and good earthly parent to present their petitions, would do it with reverence, according to the true spirit of the fifth commandment, and not with any such familiarity as might be allowable in approaching their equals. They would remember that they go to ask for favors, and not to claim their rights, favors which the parent may grant or withhold, at his pleasure. If they had been disobedient to a good father, they would go with deep humility.

If they were dutiful children, they would be more concerned for his honor than for their own gratification. While they were modest, and humble, and reverential, they might manifest great earnestness in their desires, yet not forgetting the right of their parent to withhold what they asked, and if he should withhold it, being ready to acquiesce in his decision. If he had made an absolute promise respecting any particular thing, they might plead that promise, with great propriety. But where he had not made such a promise, how desirable soever the favor might appear to them, dutiful and affectionate children would certainly feel more confidence in the superior wisdom of a wise and good parent, than they would in their own. This shows us what is essential to right prayer. The distance between a holy God and his sinful creatures is immense; and those who have a proper sense of his infinite majesty, and of their own vileness, will approach him with the deepest reverence. They will be far, very far, from that familiar mode of address with which our ears are sometimes shocked, and which betrays a feeling quite the reverse of that holy fear and reverend awe which is essential to true piety. Where God has made an absolute promise, as he did to Jacob, they will feel at liberty to plead that promise, with a truly filial temper. But where he has made no such promise, how desirable soever the thing they ask may appear to them, and with how much perseverance soever, and humble, reverential importunity they may be disposed to urge their request, they will do it with a deep sense of their own incompetence to decide what is best, and with full confidence in the superior wisdom of their Heavenly Father. They will have *faith* in his wisdom, to discern, better than they can, what is most for his glory; *faith* in his goodness, to choose what he sees to be best adapted to promote it, and *faith* in his power, to do that which is wisest and best: "for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." And in the exercise of this faith in God, they will be ready to acquiesce in the decision which he shall make, and be willing to be denied the particular thing they have requested, and choose to have it denied, if God shall see that to be best.

This, I think, is the prayer of faith. It is an expression of a truly filial temper. And every child of God must be conscious that he possesses something of this temper, and offers some prayers like these. On the contrary, a prayer that has not these essential qualities, a prayer that expresses no reverence for God, a prayer that is couched in the language of demand, and assumes to dictate to the Most High, a prayer that is destitute of humility, that does not regard the glory of God as the ultimate end, that claims the identical thing asked, though there is no absolute promise in the case, and that refuses to submit the matter of request with a "not my will, but thine be done;" a prayer that manifests full confidence in our own wisdom to discern what is best, and an unwillingness to be denied; such a prayer, though improperly called prayer, is the prayer of *unbelief*, and must be offensive to a holy God.

Thus far, perhaps, there will be no essential disagreement among Christians, in their view of this subject. But it is necessary to make further inquiries. Have Christians reason to expect they shall obtain, in all cases, the identical thing they ask for? Is such an expectation essential to right prayer? Does it constitute the faith which renders prayer prevailing? May we urge Christians to pray in the exercise of this belief, and assure them that if they will, they shall obtain, in all cases, the particular favors they ask? Is all prayer to be condemned, as essentially defective and absolutely sinful, which is not made with this belief, and which does not obtain the thing asked for? If a sinner remains unconverted, is it a certain proof that he has not been prayed for as he ought to have been?

I cannot adopt the theory which answers these questions in the affirmative. One reason is, that I find several prayers recorded in the Scriptures, which I cannot condemn, but which did not obtain the thing asked for. Moses prayed to be allowed to enter the promised land, but was only permitted to see it from a distance. The Lord Jesus prayed that the cup might pass from him, but was only strengthened to drink it. Paul prayed that the thorn in his flesh might be removed, but only obtained divine support to endure it. I do not see any reason to

condemn these prayers, but must believe they were acceptable to God.

If I should adopt this theory, I see not how I can believe there are any Christians in the world, or ever have been. There can be no Christians without prayer. There can be no Christian who does not pray for the success of the gospel, and the conversion of the world. If all right prayer obtains the thing asked for, and there had been any right prayer for the conversion of the world, the world would have been converted. The Lord Jesus as a man was bound to perform every duty. If it is my duty to pray for the conversion of every sinner, believing that he will be converted, it was his duty to make the same prayer. And if my performance of my duty in this respect would issue in the conversion of every sinner, the same result would have followed from the performance of the same duty by the Lord Jesus Christ.

I cannot adopt this theory, and urge it upon others as a duty to pray for the conversion of every sinner believing that it will be done, and assuring them that, if they do so pray, it will be done, because the inconsistency between my principles and practice would be so great, that I should not expect to be believed, nor even to obtain credit for sincerity. For I should expect they would say to me If your principles are correct, why do you call upon us to do what you can so easily do yourself? Why do you not pray thus for the conversion of all men, and secure their salvation at once? Such an inquiry would close my lips. I could not reprove others for not praying thus, when the reproof itself would be an admission that I never did it myself.

I cannot adopt this theory, because it sets out with wrong principles. We cannot believe anything, without some evidence, real or supposed, that the thing we believe is true. To believe without evidence, is not *faith*, but *presumption*. If I should exhort you to pray for the conversion of an individual, believing that it will take place, and should tell you that if you will so pray he will be converted, you may ask me what evidence there is that this individual will be converted? If there is evidence in existence that he will be converted, sufficient to war-

rant your belief when it shall be made known to you, it proves that he will be converted, whether that evidence is made known to you, or remains concealed from you, and whether you believe it or not. If the thing is true, it cannot be made untrue by your failing to believe it. If the thing is untrue, your believing it will not make it true. You may deceive yourself, and you may deceive the individual for whom you pray, by believing it without evidence. And I fear that very many are thus fatally deceived. Can I tell you that there is evidence sufficient to warrant your belief? Is there evidence, in the case of any individual now in his sins, that he will be converted? evidence sufficient to warrant your belief that he will be? You call upon me for it. Where can I find it? The Bible nowhere mentions his name and predicts that he will be converted. If it did, I could show you the place, and you could believe it. And if it did, your unbelief, and the unbelief of others could not hinder it.

But, do not the Scriptures contain many promises that prayer shall be heard and answered? Certainly; promises enough to afford all the encouragement a true Christian can desire. Why, then, is not the belief of those promises the same as a belief that the very thing asked for will be granted? In the first place, those promises, except in the case of particular predictions, do not contain an assurance that the very thing we ask shall be done; but only that it shall be done, *if* it is best; and if not best, that something else which is better shall be done in its stead. Paul's prayer, that the thorn in his flesh might be removed, was answered in this way. And this must satisfy every true child of God. For, he knows that he is not so wise as his Heavenly Father, and cannot know what is best, in all cases.

But secondly, if the general promise to hear and answer prayer, was, as it is not, a promise to grant the very thing asked for, this would not be a warrant for our belief, at the time, and in the place, where, according to this theory, that belief is needed. For that promise is doubtless made to right prayer, and to no other. We must, then, in the first place, make a right prayer, that is, we must pray the prayer of faith. In the second place, we must reflect upon what we have done, and find evidence

that our prayer was rightly made. Then, in the third place, and not till then, we might believe that the thing would be done. But this is too late. The faith must be exercised in the first step of the process, in order to make the prayer right. But there is no warrant for it, to be derived from the promise, till we come to the third step. If the faith required were a belief that God would hear and answer all right prayer, by doing that which Infinite Wisdom sees best, that faith could be exercised in the first step; for it has the promises of the Bible for its foundation. But if the faith required is a belief that the thing we ask will be done, it is clear that those promises contain no warrant for it, and nothing on which it can be founded, till after the right prayer is made, and is known to have been made. Where, then, is the evidence that we can have, before we begin to pray, which will warrant us in believing that the thing we are about to pray for will be done, and in view of which it will be possible for us to pray with such a faith? It cannot be in the Bible, but must be derived from some other source.

From what other source can it be derived? Does the Holy Spirit *reveal* to individuals what is about to be done, by the *impressions* he makes upon their minds? This opinion has had many advocates. It was entertained by many in the days of President Edwards. And he thought it so dangerous in its tendency that he took much pains to refute it. In his *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England*, he mentions this as "one erroneous principle, than which scarcely any has proved more mischievous to the present glorious work of God." And he says, "By such a notion the devil has a great door open for him; and if once this opinion should come to be fully yielded to, and established in the church of God, Satan would have opportunity thereby to set up himself as the guide and oracle of God's people, and to have his word regarded as their infallible rule, and so to lead them where he would, and to introduce what he pleased, and soon to bring the Bible into neglect and contempt." And he further observes, "It is enough to astonish one, that such multiplied plain instances of the failing of such supposed revelations, in the event, does not open every

one's eyes. I have seen so many instances of the failing of such impressions, that would almost furnish a history. I have been acquainted with them when made under all kinds of circumstances, and have seen them fail in the event, when made with such circumstances as have been fairest and brightest and most promising." And he adds, "Why cannot we be contented with the divine oracles, that holy, pure word of God, that we have in such abundance, and such clearness, now since the canon of Scripture is completed? Why should we desire to have anything added to them by impulses from above? Why should not we rest in that standing rule that God has given to his church, which the apostle teaches us is surer than a voice from heaven?"

But, it may be asked, whether the Holy Spirit may not make known to us what is about to be done, by exciting our desires towards a particular object with unusual force? And is not this what is to be understood by a spirit of prayer? I think not. If it were so, it would be the same as a new revelation. And the faith exercised in view of it, would be the same as the faith of miracles. The apostles preached by divine inspiration; for the Bible was not then completed. And miracles were necessary to prove their inspiration. But the Bible is now completed, and is declared to be a sufficient guide; and all addition or diminution is prohibited, in the most solemn manner. Besides, if it could be our duty to trust in any such impressions or desires, we must certainly know that they were from the Holy Spirit, and not from any other cause, before they could be any warrant for our belief. It would not be sufficient to know that they were holy desires. For Paul had such desires for the salvation of his nation, and expresses them in the strongest manner; but they were not granted. And if it should be granted that the Holy Spirit does thus make special revelations now, in particular cases, which are a sufficient warrant for believing that the event revealed will take place, it must be granted that they are *special cases*; and, of course, that those who do not have these revelations are not to blame for not believing them. If this were the prayer of faith, it could not be a duty binding upon all, but only upon those to whom these revelations

were made. And not binding upon them, till there was undoubted evidence that they were from the Spirit of God, and not from the spirit of darkness. But it cannot be so; for the true prayer of faith is a duty binding upon all.

There is another consequence resulting from the theory, that we must, in order to pray right, believe that the very thing we ask will be done. It is, that we must never pray with submission. According to the theory in question, the prayer of the Lord Jesus in the garden, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," must be regarded as an unbelieving prayer, and must be condemned as wrong. And not only so, but we must condemn all submission in relation to those things which are proper subjects of prayer. But everything that we may lawfully desire, and ask for, is a proper subject of prayer; and there is no duty more frequently enjoined, nor for which there is more frequent occasion, than the duty of submission. And to withhold it in relation to those things which we ask in prayer, is, virtually, to set up our own wisdom as infallible.

But it may be said, for it has been said, that, in praying for temporal blessings we may exercise submission, but not in praying for spiritual blessings. In relation to these, it is said, "We are to come boldly to the throne of grace, with no reservation, with no hesitation; for we know the *will* of God on this subject. He has expressly said, and with an oath, that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that he turn from his way and live." Is there any ground for such a distinction? Is there anything in the Scriptures which forbids us to pray in faith for temporal blessings? Are we not taught in the Lord's prayer to ask for our daily bread? And may we not do it in faith? If faith is inconsistent with submission, we must cease to pray for all those things in which we may exercise submission; for we must not pray for anything without faith. But, do we know the *will* of God in relation to spiritual blessings; such a *will* as can be the ground for believing that they will certainly be granted? In itself considered, doubtless, God desires the best good of every creature he has made. But, does he, on the whole, *will* or choose to bestow all spiritual

blessings upon all men ? And is that the meaning of his oath that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked ? Is it his determination to save all ? We must believe that it is, in order to make his will the ground for praying for their salvation believing that it will be granted. If the reason assigned, then, for praying for spiritual blessings without submission, is a sufficient reason for praying for them believing that they will be granted, and the blessings asked for are the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of Christians, and it is a duty to pray thus for all men, it can be on no other ground than that of universal salvation. Those who believe that doctrine, and those only, can pray for the conversion of every sinner believing that it will be done. But so I cannot believe, while I assent to the word of God as contained in the Bible.

Will it be asked, then, must we pray *expecting nothing* ? By no means. God has not said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me, in vain. Right prayer is always heard, and God will always give it all that influence with him which it is suitable it should have. No prayer will ever be lost. If it do not have influence to obtain the very thing asked for, it will have influence to obtain something better ; and something with which the child of God will be better pleased, when he comes to know all the reasons of the case. And while he does not know those reasons, the dutiful and affectionate child has room to exercise faith in the wisdom and goodness of his Heavenly Father. And he does exercise it. And this faith is well pleasing to God, and an anchor to his own soul.

But, it may be asked further, whether the child of God, after being conscious to himself that he has prayed for a particular object, with a truly filial temper, has not more reason to hope he shall obtain the thing desired, than he had before he prayed for it in this manner ? I answer, yes. And why ? Because God has given abundant evidence in the Scriptures that prayer is an effectual means of obtaining blessings, both for ourselves and others. The prayers of Jacob turned away the anger of Esau. The prayers of Moses often saved the Israelites in the wilderness. The prayers of Joshua stopped the sun and moon in their course. The prayers of Samuel

saved the people from the Philistines. The prayers of Elijah shut up the heavens for three years and six months, and again procured rain to water the earth. The prayers of Jehoshaphat procured a great deliverance from his enemies. The prayers of Hezekiah prolonged his life. And the prayers of the church procured the deliverance of Peter. Many other cases are on record, for our encouragement. The providence of God, in every age of the world, has furnished multiplied instances of the prevalence of prayer. The church, indeed, were not expecting Peter, when he made his appearance before them. But their prayers are not to be considered the less efficacious on that account. And the prayer of Paul, that the thorn in his flesh might be removed, procured a gracious answer, though a different blessing was bestowed from the one he asked.

When the church are roused to pray for a revival of religion, and the conversion of sinners, there is much more reason to hope the blessing will be obtained, than there was before they had this spirit of prayer. The connection which has been observed, in the providence of God, between the prayers of the church, and the bestowment of this blessing, furnishes the reason for this hope. And there is no minister, who desires the spiritual good of his people, but must take encouragement, when he sees indications of a greater spirit of prayer among them. It is the usual course of divine Providence; and this is the ground of his hope that the blessing he desires is about to be granted. I call it *hope*, and not *faith*. For, though the event is highly probable, it is not certain. And, while probability is the ground of hope, it requires absolute certainty to be a ground of faith. Probability may, indeed, sometimes appear so strong, that the hope may be easily mistaken for faith, by those who do not carefully discriminate. And, in this way, I think, some truly pious people have fallen into the mistake of supposing that they must believe the thing asked for will be granted. They have felt their hearts uncommonly drawn out in prayer for a revival of religion. This has led them to converse with their brethren, and to endeavor to rouse them too. They have found their brethren partaking in the same feelings, and manifesting the same

spirit of prayer. And their hope has in this way been excited. While thus praying, and thus hoping, they have become more diligent and faithful in the use of proper means to excite the attention of the impenitent around them. And they have found them easily accessible, and disposed to listen seriously to what was said to them. This has added to their hopes, and increased their diligence and their prayers, till the probability of success has become so strong, that they have indulged great confidence that the blessing would follow. But still, it is *hope*, and not *faith*, so long as it is built upon probabilities, and not upon absolute certainty. But, want of careful discrimination has led them, in these circumstances, to mistake strong *hope* for *faith*; and they have been led to embrace the opinion that they had prayed *believing* that the event would take place; and that it has taken place in consequence of their praying in the exercise of this belief.

In like manner, doubtless, it often happens, in praying for the conversion of particular individuals. A variety of circumstances may lead the Christian to feel an unusual interest in the spiritual welfare of an individual. In view of those circumstances, he is led to pray for that individual. And the more he prays for him the more he will be likely to contemplate the circumstances which give a particular interest to his case. While doing this, his feelings are still more excited in his behalf. And as a consequence of this, his heart is drawn out in prayer for him, with peculiar earnestness. When reflecting upon the state of his own feelings in this case, and reviewing the prayers he has made, so far as he finds they possess the marks of true prayer, he finds some encouragement to pray more; and if he can, also, to use the proper means to call the attention of that individual to the concerns of his soul. The earnestness you manifest in his behalf is adapted to impress his mind, and lead him to attend seriously to the subject. From this you take encouragement to continue praying, and using the means with him; and as it often happens, God is pleased apparently to give success to these means, and he is hopefully converted. Your *hopes*, faint at first, perhaps, but gradually growing stronger, as you have perceived greater

probability of success, may easily be mistaken for faith, if you do not discriminate; and thus you may be led to think it was your *believing* that he would be converted which has made your prayers and efforts successful.

Some of the evils which this mistake seems likely to produce have been already hinted at. There is another which I should greatly fear. If I should imbibe the opinion that in order to pray aright for the conversion of my friend, I must pray for it believing that he would be converted, this would be known to him. And it would be adapted to lead him to place great dependence on my prayers, and prepare him to be fatally deceived. For as soon as he thought I had prayed in faith for his conversion, he would begin to think he should be converted. From this he would find some relief; and this relief he would be very likely to think was conversion itself. And so he would begin to hope. And if I thought I had prayed in faith for his conversion, as soon as I found him relieved and hoping, I should be likely to think him converted, and to encourage his hope. And there is no way in which I can conceive an anxious sinner to be more likely to be deceived to his eternal ruin than this would be.

Let us, then, be deeply sensible of the importance of discrimination, in matters of such solemnity and importance as this. And while we take encouragement to pray, and pray in *hope*, let us not mistake hope for faith, nor probability for certainty. But let us pray in faith, the faith which consists in believing that God will do what is best, the faith which reposes, with entire confidence, on his infinite wisdom and goodness and power, and is as ready to acquiesce in a denial of our requests, if so it shall seem good in his sight, as it is to accept with thankfulness and joy the blessings for which we humbly pray, if God shall see fit to bestow them.

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ALL FOR THE BEST.



WHEN we look at the various evils with which we are surrounded, and confine our view to them alone, how very undesirable they appear. What matter of regret it seems that they should exist; and how much better it would seem to be if they could all be avoided, and the whole universe contain nothing but good. But they *do* exist; and some will continue to exist forever. Sin and misery abound in this world; and, according to the Scriptures, many will be the subjects of sin and misery in the world to come. Can any good come out of this? Or must every benevolent being, in the view of it, sit down forever in unavailing sorrow? Must we wish this world had never been made, since it contains so much evil? Shall we think that God might have done better than he has done; and consequently not feel that respect and esteem towards him which we could have felt if he had done better? Shall we believe that God is disappointed in the result of his works; and that the end he had in view will fail of being accomplished? Will the Divine Being himself, in the final issue of things, wish this world had never been made, and find his happiness forever destroyed by the evils which have marred his work, and defeated its end? Or, is there reason to believe that no evil exists, but what is connected with some good sufficient to overbalance the evil? Would it not be a great source of comfort to every benevolent mind, when contemplating the evils it sees, if it could be made to appear that there is a good reason for them all; a reason, in view of which it is better that they should exist than that they should not? Must it not appear highly desirable, to every one that loves God, to be able to believe, on good grounds, that he has done wisely and well, in all that he has done; and that he will not fail, in the end, to bring into existence the highest possible amount of good, in the intelligent universe?

It is declared in the Scriptures, that "all things work together for good to them that love God." This cannot

mean, merely, that the personal good of the saints is secure, and that all things tend to promote it. The saints are benevolent beings. The highest good of the universe is the object on which they have set their hearts. Nothing will satisfy their benevolent desires but the accomplishment of that great object. They love God supremely; and wish to see him glorified. They also love their fellow creatures; and wish them the greatest possible good. That God may be glorified in the highest degree, all his perfections must be exercised in the fullest manner, and be exhibited to the best advantage. His wisdom and goodness, his justice, and mercy, and grace, his power, and truth, and faithfulness, must all be exercised in perfect harmony. The highest good of creatures consists in the highest degree of holiness and happiness of which they are capable. The highest good of the universe does not consist in either of these objects, taken separately, but in both combined. It is the highest amount of holiness and happiness which can be brought into existence, among intelligent beings, including both the Creator and his creatures. This is the great object which all benevolent beings desire. This constitutes their chief good. And this is the object which all things conspire to promote.

It is the design of this tract to show that *every event which takes place is for the best.*

Before proceeding to the proof of this proposition, it may be well to explain its meaning, that no misunderstanding may occur. It is not meant that every event is good in itself, and desirable for its own sake. A thing may be considered, at one time, by itself alone, without reference to its connections and consequences. It is then considered as it is *in itself*. At another time, the same thing may be considered in connection with all its consequences and results. Then it is considered as it is *on the whole*. Holiness is good in itself, and desirable for its own sake. So is happiness. But sin is evil in itself, and for its own sake undesirable. And so is misery. Among the events which take place, are very many which in themselves are evils, and for their own sake are undesirable. And when such are said to be for the best, nothing is meant inconsistent with their being regarded as evils in

themselves. But an event which is evil in itself may have some good consequences. And it is possible for the good of those consequences to be greater in amount than the evil of the event; so that, when the good and the evil are taken together, there may be a balance of good; and it may be better, on the whole, that both should exist, than that both should fail. If the evil of the event and the good of the consequences should be equal in amount, the event would be, on the whole, a matter of indifference. If the evil should overbalance the good, it would be on the whole undesirable. But if the good should overbalance the evil, it would be on the whole desirable, and for the best. When, therefore, any event which is evil in itself is said to be on the whole for the best, this is what is meant—that the good of the consequences will overbalance the evil, so that there will be a clear gain of good, on the whole, from the existence of that event.

The distinction which is here made is not a mere distinction in theory. It is a distinction which every one makes in his daily practice. Men submit to labor and toil and fatigue, not because they consider them desirable in themselves, but as the means of acquiring wealth. They choose them, not for their own sake, but for the sake of their good consequences. The sick man considers the nauseous drug prescribed, as very undesirable in itself, and one which he would never choose for its own sake; but when he regards it as the means of regaining his health, he thinks the good will overbalance the evil, and chooses to take it as on the whole for the best.

It is to be observed also, that all events are connected together, and go to form one great whole. If any event should take place differently from what it now does, the whole system would be different. And whenever an event which now takes place is said to be for the best, it is meant that it is a necessary part of the best possible system. The best system is that which includes the greatest amount of good, on the whole, after deducting as much as will balance the evil. And when it is said, that the present system is better than any other possible system, it is meant, that, after deducting from the good as much as will balance all the evil, there is a greater sum of good remaining than there would have been in any other

possible system. When it is said, then, that every event which takes place is for the best, it is meant that it is a necessary part of the best possible system of events; and that if any alteration were made, in any respect, there would be less good on the whole, than there will be now; and the system, as a whole, would be less perfect, and less desirable.

It is now to be proved, that, *every event which takes place is for the best.*

As to those events which are good in themselves there is no dispute. The only question is, whether those events which are in themselves evil, are, on the whole, for the best. That it has been so in a great many cases is easily seen. Events which were evil in themselves have been made the occasion of good—good which could not otherwise have been secured, and great enough to overbalance the evil.

The fall of man was in itself an evil of great magnitude. But it afforded an opportunity for God to exercise and display his wonderful mercy and grace in saving sinners. All admit that without a discovery of the mercy and grace of God, his character cannot be seen in its greatest glory. But there is no way in which mercy and grace can be seen, other than in their actual exercise towards sinners. You may tell a blind man of the beauty of colors; but he can form no adequate conception of them till his eyes are opened, and he sees them actually displayed before him. So creatures might be told of the mercy and grace of God; but they must have been forever unable to know anything of these glorious traits of the divine character, if there had been no sinners to save. The fall of man, though a great evil, is more than balanced by the good of which it is the occasion, the good which is accomplished in the gift of a Saviour, and the work of redemption.

The hatred of Joseph's brethren was in itself an evil; but it was the means of his going down into Egypt. The wicked conduct of Joseph's mistress was in itself an evil; but it was the means of his being cast into prison. And these trials were the means of preparing Joseph for the important part he was afterwards to act. The imprisonment of the servants of Pharaoh was in itself an evil;

but it was the means of their acquaintance with Joseph. The forgetfulness of the chief butler was in itself an evil; but it was the means of Joseph's enlargement at the most favorable time, and under the most favorable circumstances. And these things together were the means of Joseph's advancement, and the preservation of the chosen seed during the seven years of famine. Hence Joseph says to his brethren, "As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good."

The hardness of heart and wicked obstinacy of Pharaoh were in themselves evils; but they were the means of making known the power and the justice of God in his destruction. Hence God says to him, "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth."

The pride of Vashti and the wickedness of Haman were in themselves evils; but they were the means of the advancement of Esther and Mordecai, which was the means of great good to the church of God at that time. The opposition of the enemies of the Jews, in the days of Ezra, to the rebuilding of the temple, and their application to Darius to stop the work, were in themselves evils; but they were the means of procuring from him a decree that the work should go on, and that those very men should give their assistance in promoting it.

The manner in which our Lord was treated, his being despised and rejected of men, his being abused in every form which malice could invent, was in itself an evil; but it was the means of exhibiting his true character to the study and imitation of his followers. His patience, his meekness, his forbearance, and resignation, could not have been seen, if he had not had these opportunities of exhibiting them. The death of Christ was in itself an evil; but it was the means of accomplishing great good. Without it no atonement had been made, and all mankind must have been lost forever. The good of which this great evil was the means, is so much greater than the evil, that it has always been considered matter of thanksgiving and praise that the Father sent the Son, and that the Son freely gave up himself to be a propitiation for the sins of the world. The persecutions and sufferings of

the early Christians were in themselves great evils; but they always resulted in the enlargement of the church. And so uniformly has this result followed the persecution of Christ's disciples, that it is an established maxim, that, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Many examples of this kind might be cited. They show that good has been brought out of evil, and so much good as greatly to overbalance the evil, and render it on the whole for the best that those events have taken place. And this is sufficient to render it *highly probable* that it is so in all cases.

But this is not all. The perfections of God render it certain that every event which takes place is for the best. God is infinite in knowledge, infinite in goodness, and infinite in power. No one will deny that he has these perfections. He could not be God, if he were deficient in any of them. But, if he is infinite in knowledge, he knows what is for the best; if he is infinite in goodness, he chooses that what is for the best should take place; and if he is infinite in power, nothing can prevent his bringing to pass whatever he chooses should come to pass. It is certain, then, that whatever takes place is for the best.

To state the argument more at large. God is infinite in knowledge. He looks through all space and all duration with a single glance. He perceives all the consequences of things, and all the bearings of each event, before it takes place as well as after. If any event will mar the system, and render it less good on the whole, he knows it perfectly. Of all possible systems, he must have known from the beginning which was the best. And if the present system is not the best, and if all its parts are not the best adapted to promote the great end of the whole, and arranged in the best possible manner, it cannot be for the want of knowledge in God. He knew it as well before he created the world, as it ever can be known.

God is also infinite in goodness. And this must prompt him to choose what is best. To say that God is infinitely good, and yet prefers a less good to a greater good, is a contradiction. When, therefore, he perceived among all

possible systems, which was the best, he must have chosen it, in preference to all others. If he chooses that the greatest sum of good should be brought into existence, he must choose that those events should take place which are best adapted to secure this great end. Hence, if the present system is not the best, it is not that which God prefers. He has seen that a different system would be better, and set his heart upon it, and exerted himself to the utmost to carry it into effect, but has failed in the attempt. He has done all he could to prevent the existence of such events as he saw to be not for the best, but has found himself unable!

But this cannot be: for God is infinite in power. He is the Almighty. None can stay his hand, or resist his will. If he sees that a certain system is the best, containing the greatest possible amount of good, he is able to carry it into complete effect. Every event which is on the whole for the best, he is able to bring to pass. And every event which is not for the best, he is able to prevent. No event, then, comes into existence, but what is for the best.

It may be, however, notwithstanding the certainty of this conclusion, that some will still doubt. They cannot see *how* certain events can be for the best; and so, they are ready to conclude they cannot be. But, what if we cannot see *how*? Could Joseph see *how* his going into Egypt as a slave, was to be for the best? Yet so it proved. Could Jacob see *how* the apparent loss of his children, was to be for the best, when he said, "All these things are against me?" Yet, time showed him his mistake. Could the Israelites see *how* it was for the best for them, in their flight from Egypt, to be hemmed in by the mountains, with the sea before them, and their angry foes in the rear? Yet a short season unfolded the mystery, and turned their murmurs and complaints into songs of triumph. Is there no ground for trust in God? If we cannot see through his designs, if we cannot perceive the wisdom of his purposes, can we repose no confidence in his infinite perfection? Is it reasonable for us to condemn a whole system, when we have seen but a small part of it? Is it not presumption in us to array our ignorance against the perfections of the Almighty; and be-

cause we cannot see the wisdom and goodness of his dispensations, to dare tell him he might have done better than he has done? Let us humble ourselves, and be ashamed, if we have indulged so impious a thought.

But, perhaps some may say, they are satisfied with what God has done: they believe what he has done is for the best: but they think many events take place, in which he has no hand: and these are the things which they think not for the best. What are these things? Are they the introduction of sin into the world, and the various sins which are committed? These are, in themselves, great evils; but before we conclude they are not for the best, let us consider them carefully.

Take the introduction of sin into the world, in the fall of man. Was it for the best that man should fall? Is the answer, No? Why, then, did not God prevent it? Did he not know whether it would be for the best, or not? Was he not acquainted with all the consequences which would flow from this event? Did he not know whether it would introduce more evil than good into the system? If he saw all the consequences, and knew it would be unspeakably better that they should not take place, why did he not prevent them? Had he no choice about it? To say that he knew it was not for the best, and yet had no choice whether it should take place, or not, is very highly to impeach his goodness. Did he choose to prevent it, then, but find himself unable? Was man stronger than God? Was Almighty power too weak to control a creature? This cannot be supposed. To say this, is to say that God is not Almighty. The conclusion, then, is, that God did not prevent man from sinning, because he did not, on the whole, choose to prevent him. And he did not choose to prevent him, because it was not best in his view that he should be prevented; that is, it was, on the whole, for the best, in the view of Infinite Wisdom, that man should fall.

But some have intimated, and others have dared to say openly, it was not for the best that man should fall; and God knew it was not, and chose to prevent it, but could not, without destroying the freedom of man as a moral agent; and this is the reason he did not prevent it.

This is strange ground to take. Those who say this,

say what they cannot prove; and by saying it, they contradict themselves, change sides, and advocate the conclusion which they profess to oppose. They say what they cannot prove. It was possible for God to prevent the fall of man without touching his moral agency. There is no error in the assumption, that God could have prevented all sin in a moral system, if he had seen it to be best. It is absurd to suppose an all-wise Being would give existence to creatures whose conduct he knew he could not control; and who would therefore be as likely to defeat as to accomplish the end for which he made them. And it is a dictate of common sense that the Most High God could have governed creatures entirely dependent on him, so as to make them obedient and keep them so. He could have kept them out of the reach of temptation. He could have "put his Spirit within them, and caused them to walk in his statutes." "Not being sufficient of themselves to think any thing, as of themselves," he could have "worked in them to will and to do," in such a manner as to prevent the entrance of sin into the universe. "Holding in his hand the hearts of all beings, he could have turned them whithersoever he would." The assumption, therefore, is not gratuitous, that God could have prevented all sin among moral agents. And the conclusion is undeniable, that he has not done it, because he saw it was not for the best that it should be done. Furthermore, those who say it was not for the best that man should fall, and that the reason why God did not prevent it, was, that he must thereby have destroyed the freedom of man as a moral agent, in so saying, contradict themselves, change sides, and advocate the conclusion they profess to oppose. For it is the same as to say, it was better, in God's view, that man should fall, than that his moral agency should be destroyed; which is the same as to say, it was, on the whole, for the best that man should fall.

If we take any other event, the result will be the same. If it is not for the best, why is it not prevented? Not for the want of knowledge in God; not for the want of goodness; not for the want of power. The conclusion, therefore, is irresistible. The infinite knowledge of God enables him to perceive what events are for the best; his

infinite goodness prompts him to choose that those events should take place; and his infinite power enables him to bring them to pass. All events, therefore, which do take place, are for the best.

Several *objections* are made against this doctrine, all of which are easily answered, by a careful attention to what has been already said. It is objected, that if all things which take place are for the best, then sin must be a good thing, and the more of it the better. The answer is, it is not contended that every thing is good in its own nature, nor best in itself considered. Sin is evil in its own nature, and so is misery. But the sin and misery which exist, are made the means, in the providence of God, of so much good, that it is better on the whole that the evil should exist than that the good connected with it should fail. It was better that Judas should betray his Lord, than that there should be no redemption for a ruined world. And as to the other part of the objection, it should be observed, that the doctrine here advocated is, that the present system, just as it is, is the best possible system. And to say, that, because the sin which takes place is for the best, it would be better to have more, is the same as to say, that, because the present system is the best, a different system would be better, which is a contradiction.

It is objected, that, if every event is for the best, then some sin is for the best, and we ought not to oppose, but encourage it. The answer to this is, sin is wrong in itself, and we ought to oppose it because it is wrong in itself, and leave it to God, who governs the world, to overrule it for good. But, it is asked, if some sin is for the best, why does God forbid it in his law? why does he not rather command it? This objection answers itself. Obedience to the divine commands is not sin. To say it is best there should be some sin, is the same as to say, it is best there should be some transgression of the divine law. And it does not follow, as the objection supposes, that because the present system is the best, a different system would be better.

It is objected, that, if whatever takes place is for the best, then the sin which is committed tends to advance the great end God has in view, and ought not to be punished, but rewarded. The answer to this is, that, utility

does not constitute virtue. Good and ill desert depend, not upon what men accomplish, but upon what they intend. Joseph's brethren intended evil, while they were the means of accomplishing good. They felt guilty, and were self-condemned, though they were assured by him that "God meant it unto good." It is so in all cases. The design of the wicked is always an improper design; and they deserve to be punished for their improper design. And when they receive that punishment, it will accord with the dictates of their own consciences, the good which God has intended and accomplished by them notwithstanding.

It is objected, that, if every event is for the best, there is no ground for the exercise of repentance. It is asked, "What benevolent being can ingenuously regret that by sin he has put it in the power of God to produce greater good than he could otherwise produce? Ought it not rather to be matter of grateful praise, that he has furnished the necessary means of the greatest possible amount of good?" The answer to this objection is, that, it is founded on an entire mistake of the nature of true repentance, and confounds it with the repentance of Judas, with the sorrow of the world which worketh death. Judas, doubtless, wished on the whole that he had not betrayed his Lord; and this repentance led him to destroy himself. So, doubtless, will every sinner feel, when he receives the due reward of his deeds. But true repentance is radically different. The vile nature of sin, is its proper object; and not its consequences, as the objection plainly supposes. The true penitent loathes and abhors himself for the wicked design with which he is conscious of having acted, while he feels bound to love and praise God for the good which *He* has brought to pass by that means. Those who participated in the death of Christ, might, some of them, have been brought to repentance. It was not necessary that they should wish Christ had not been put to death, and so that no door of mercy had been opened. Yet, they could repent of their sin in what they had done to accomplish it. They could loathe and abhor themselves for their bad design in what they had done, while they could love and praise God for his good design in thus providing a way of salvation.

It appears, then, that there is no valid objection to the doctrine which has been supported. Every event which takes place is for the best.

There is only room to make a remark or two. If every event which takes place is for the best, then God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass. The principal objections to the doctrine of decrees are, that the decrees are thought to be inconsistent with the free agency of creatures, and to teach that God wills the existence of what had better be kept out of existence. But, both these objections are unfounded. The true doctrine of decrees is, that God, for the wisest and best reasons, chooses that men should freely will and do, just that which they will and do. Every event which takes place is for the best; and God chooses that every event should take place, just as it does, because it is wisest and best. This doctrine, and this only, is consistent with the perfect blessedness of God, who could not be happy if his wise and benevolent designs were counteracted; and with the perfect blessedness of the saints in heaven, whose happiness would be equally destroyed if they should find that what was wisest and best had not been brought to pass. And in view of it, every benevolent being may rejoice now, under all the evils he sees, and all those which are in prospect; and may answer every desponding doubt, and every unbelieving fear, with the words of the Apostle, "*We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.*"

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THE RENEWAL OF SINNERS

THE WORK OF

DIVINE POWER.

[BY REV. LEONARD WOODS, D. D.]



THE defective and erroneous views which are commonly entertained on the subject of regeneration, are to be traced to a variety of causes. The worldly employments in which men are engaged, so occupy their active powers, that they give but little attention to their spiritual concerns; and thus they fail of understanding the doctrine of the new birth, because they neglect it. The speculations which have been started by men of a philosophical taste, and the objections urged against the truth by the enemies of religion, have had a powerful tendency to fill the mind with doubts and misconceptions concerning the doctrine now to be considered. But the great source of error on this subject, is that blindness of mind and depravity of heart, which nothing but the regenerating influence of the Spirit will ever remove. Those men, and those only, have a right perception of the nature and importance of regeneration, who have experienced it in themselves. The eyes of their understanding are enlightened, so that they discern spiritual things. They know what is the hope of their calling, and what is the riches of the glory of their inheritance, and *what is the exceeding greatness of God's power towards them, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.* Ephesians i. 19, 20.

The design of this Tract is not to range over the whole subject of regeneration, but to call the attention of the reader to that particular view of it which is presented

by the passage just referred to, and to inquire what conceptions the scriptures teach us to form of *the power of God in the renewal of sinners*.

In the *first* place, the scriptures lead us to take the general position, that *the renewal of sinners is effected by divine power*.

By *power* is to be understood, *that which produces, or is competent to produce effects*,—whether the effects are of one kind or another. It would amount to the same thing, if we should define power to be, that which is or may be *the cause of effects*. This seems to be the precise idea conveyed by the word. Whether we speak of the power of a magnet, of wind, of the understanding, or of any thing else either material or mental, we speak of it in relation to certain things done, or to be done,—to certain effects produced, or which may be produced. You can test the truth of these remarks by a careful examination of your own thoughts. Just point out the effect produced, or to be produced, and refer it to some being or thing, *as the cause*, and you have the idea of the *power* which that being or thing possesses. So as to the power of God. If we consider the creation and preservation of the world, and all the other effects which have taken place and which may take place, and ascribe them to God as *the cause*; we arrive at the idea of his *power*.

And not only our general idea of God's power, but all our particular conceptions of it, and the epithets we use to mark those conceptions, relate to the nature and circumstances of the different effects produced. Divine power cannot be supposed to be made up of different parts, one of which operates to accomplish this work, and another, that. The power of God is one and the same forever; and to that all the effects which take place must be ultimately ascribed. Thus the scriptures represent God as creating, preserving, and governing the world; sending rain; making the sun to rise, and the earth to yield her increase; making sinners holy, and guiding and controlling all intelligent beings. From these divine operations, resulting in a great variety of effects, we derive our idea of divine power.

We come now to the position above laid down, that *the renewal of sinners is effected by divine power*.

The scripture teaches this in a variety of ways. It represents that believers are God's workmanship; that they are born of God; that he quickens them; that he gives them a new heart, turns them from sin, and makes them obedient and holy. It ascribes to God, as the supreme cause, every particular thing which constitutes the character of Christians. It teaches that he gives them repentance and faith, sheds abroad his love in their hearts, enlightens them to see the excellence and glory of Christ, and works in them both to will and to do.

Thus the effect produced in regeneration is to be attributed to God. The inspired writers nowhere admit, that the honor of renewing the heart is to be divided between God and man. It is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man; but *of God*." Here every thing is excluded from being, in the proper sense, the cause of regeneration, but the power of God. So the apostle teaches, that "neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but *God* that giveth the increase;" and again, that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but *of God* who showeth mercy." Thus carefully do the sacred writers guard against defective views on this point, and thus earnestly do they labor to impress it upon our minds, that the renewal of the heart is, in the highest and fullest sense, effected by *the power of God*.

This conception of the divine power in regeneration is plain and simple. We look at holiness in man, and ascribe it to God as its cause. The view we take of this new spiritual creation is just as simple and obvious, as of the natural creation. The heavens and the earth, which once did not exist, but which now exist before our eyes, are *effects*, flowing from the operation of God's power. He created them. They exist in consequence of the act of his will. Here, that which is produced is *material*, or *physical*; in the other case, *spiritual*, or *moral*;—things in their nature altogether different from each other, but equally *effects*, resulting from the operation of divine power; so that the honor of renewing sinners is due to God, as really and directly, as the honor of creating the world. This is a practical truth, taught clearly in the scriptures, and impressed upon the hearts

of all Christians ; and impressed more and more deeply as they advance in the divine life.

The *second* position to be taken is, that the power of God displayed in regeneration, is *great* power.

One of the principles on which we are accustomed to judge of the greatness of the power exercised, is *the greatness of the effect produced*. When we look at a mountain, and contemplate its broad foundation, its lofty height, and its mighty bed of rock ; and when we go farther, and turn our thoughts to the wide and fathomless ocean, and to the whole extent of the earth, and then to the vast and numberless bodies in the expanse of the heavens, and consider them all as created and sustained and moved by the power of God ; the greatness of that power astonishes and overwhelms us. On the same principle we must regard the event which we are now considering, as manifesting *great divine power*. To give spiritual life to one who is dead in sin, and to prepare for heaven one who is fitted for destruction, is a work of no ordinary greatness. The apostle Paul, who always spoke the words of truth and soberness, likens the renewal of a sinner to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and represents it as displaying *the exceeding greatness of divine power*. And if the exercise of divine power is marked with such greatness in the renewal of a single sinner ; it is natural to reflect on the increased display of divine power according to the number of those who are renewed. What a work was accomplished, when those who afterwards constituted the Corinthian church, were made new creatures, and instead of the base and abominable passions which they once cherished, were filled with the fruits of the Spirit ! And what a work of divine power will be accomplished, when the whole multitude of God's people out of every nation under heaven, shall be saved from their sins, and made holy and happy forever in the kingdom of Christ !

But in estimating the greatness of the power which is exercised, we also take into view *the obstacles which are overcome*.

The obstacles which oppose the conversion of sinners, consist chiefly in their corrupt affections and habits ; in the entire alienation of their hearts from God, and their

settled enmity against his character and government; in their idolatrous love of the world; in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; in a loftiness of spirit which cannot be humbled, and an obstinacy which cannot be subdued, by any human means. When God speaks to sinners, and invites and solicits them to turn from their sins and become his children; their hearts instantly make resistance. And this resistance is so strong, that the most weighty motives which the Scripture presents before them, cannot overcome it. The efforts made by the wisest and most powerful of created beings, are, in themselves, of no avail. Convictions of conscience, fears of divine wrath, and the strong desires of the soul after happiness, all fail of success. Such is the opposition of the unrenewed heart to truth and holiness, that nothing but omnipotence can subdue it. And this opposition of the heart, which is so strong in itself, is increased and confirmed by the temptations of the world, and the concealed influence of the wicked one. The prince of darkness is enthroned in the hearts of the unsanctified. The power which renews them must therefore overcome that subtle and mighty foe, and all the powers of the world which are in league with him. It must dispossess them of their dominion. It must break the chains by which captives are bound, and give them freedom. The greatness of the power which belongs to the enemy of souls, and the obstinacy of the resistance which he and his allies make to the salvation of men, are learnt from the word of God, and from our own painful experience. Clearly then, the power which overcomes this subtle enemy, and all that he brings to act in alliance with him, must be exceedingly great. Hence the propriety of those scriptures which represent God our Saviour as a mighty warrior, going forth to battle, and by an act of his irresistible power subduing his enemies.

The *third* position is, that the power of God by which the renewal of sinners is effected, is *special and supernatural*.

This seems to be clearly indicated in the passage already referred to, in which the apostle speaks of the divine power in the recovery of sinners to holiness. He

does not liken it to the power of God in the growth of a tree, or in any of the great and marvellous works of nature, as thunder and earthquakes, and the motion of the heavenly bodies. But he likens it to *the power which raised Christ from the dead*,—an event in the highest sense *supernatural*. The same may be signified when the renewal of sinners is likened to the work of *creation*,—a work which did not result from the laws or powers of nature, but gave existence to nature, and originated all its powers and all its laws. The choice which the inspired writers made of these two *supernatural* works, *creation* and *resurrection*, to illustrate the renewal of sinners, was doubtless intended to have a peculiar significance.

But to make the views which are to be taken of the subject perfectly intelligible, it is necessary to give a particular explanation of the terms, *special* and *supernatural*.

A thing is frequently called *special*, if it is *uncommon*, or beyond what is *ordinary*. The effect produced by divine power in regeneration, is *a heart to love and obey God*. It is *holiness*. But this surely is a very different thing from what is *ordinarily* found in man. Those who continue in their natural state, are wholly destitute of holiness. And we well know that being *born again* is not common to men. In this particular sense, it would seem that regeneration will cease to be *special*, when it takes place *ordinarily*, as we expect it will in the millennium. But there is another and a very important sense in which regeneration will deserve to be considered as a *special* work, even when all men come to be the subjects of it. It will be totally different from any thing naturally belonging to them, or which they ever would be the subjects of, without the renewing of the Holy Ghost. And so the exercise of God's *power* in this work will be *special*, inasmuch as it will be different from any exercise of his power in the unrenewed. But this sense of *special*, is nearly allied to the sense of *supernatural*,—the other word by which this exercise of divine power has been designated.

This word, as applied to the present subject, has a sense different from *miraculous*, which is commonly used to point out preternatural events in the *material* and in-

intellectual world. *Supernatural* here relates to events in the *moral world*. Its precise meaning is, *above that which is natural*. If then we would form a definite conception of what is *supernatural*, we must first understand what is *natural*. An event is said to be *natural*, when it takes place according to the laws of nature, and in consequence of those laws. There is an established, regular mode of operation in the intellectual and moral world, as well as in the physical. A child learns to speak and read by *natural means* and in a *natural manner*; in other words, according to *the laws of his nature*, and in *consequence of the mental and bodily constitution* which God has given him; and so there is no need of his being regenerated in order to this. The feeling of pity and parental love is natural, as it spontaneously arises in the mind when the proper circumstances occur, in consequence of the constitution which God has given to man; and there is no need of regeneration in order to this. A man's literary acquisitions are natural, as they result from the efforts which he makes in the use of his natural faculties, without any special influence from above. There are also various changes in the habits and characters of men, which take place in a manner perfectly natural, such as a change from intemperance to temperance, or from indolence to industry. In a word; whatever results from causes naturally operating in man, or from any principle, faculty, or disposition naturally belonging to man, is to be considered as *natural*; and in regard to any thing of this kind, there is evidently no need of regeneration.

If it be asked, whether effects produced thus naturally, are dependent on God; I answer; yes, entirely so. "Of him, and through him, and to him are all things." The agency of God is universal, both in the material and spiritual world. But in regard to natural events, the power of God operates according to the uniform laws of nature, and shows itself merely *in* those laws. Indeed the laws of nature are to be regarded as the established methods of the divine agency. So that God's having an agency in the events which commonly take place, is perfectly consistent with those events being natural. When God causes the sun to rise, and the corn to grow; when he causes the faculties of men to increase in strength; when

he restrains the violence of their passions, and improves their amiable and useful dispositions; and when he does all this in conformity with the constitution of things in the physical and mental world, and without transcending in any respect the laws of nature; then the effects which take place are all *natural*; and it is a *natural* exercise of divine power, from which they result. Accordingly by a *supernatural* exercise of divine power is meant that which produces effects *above* what are natural.

Is then the renewal of the sinner's heart a natural event? Is holiness a natural attribute of the human mind? Or does man acquire it by the mere exercise and improvement of any of the powers, dispositions or feelings which he possesses in his natural state? To these inquiries we must answer, *No*. And this answer, which is suited to humble man, and to exalt the grace of God, is grounded on the following reason; namely; the scriptures plainly represent all men in their natural state to be without holiness, and the subjects of affections which are positively sinful; and when any one turns from sin and becomes holy, the scriptures ascribe this change of character, not to his own efforts, but to a divine cause. The apostle affirms that men are *by nature children of wrath*; which they could not be, if they were in any degree holy. Our Saviour teaches that men, as they are born into the world, are in such a sinful state, that they must be born again of the divine Spirit, to prepare them for the kingdom of heaven. But if they were in any degree holy in that state into which they are brought by their first birth; or if they could acquire holiness by the mere exercise of their natural powers; what necessity would there be for another and higher birth?

For the purpose of a still more particular illustration of the important proposition above advanced, the views of Edwards will be subjoined in several extracts from his treatise on Religious Affections. (See Edwards's Works, vol. iv. pp. 133—136, First Am. Edit.)

—“Those gracious influences which the saints are subjects of, and the effects of God's Spirit which they experience, are entirely *above nature*, altogether of a different kind from any thing which men find within themselves by nature, or only in the exercise of *natural prin-*

ciples; and are things which no improvement of those qualifications or principles that are natural, no advancing or exalting of them to higher degrees, and no kind of composition of them will ever bring men to; because they not only differ from what is natural, and from every thing that natural men experience, in degree and circumstances, but also in *kind*; and are of a nature vastly more excellent. And this is what I mean by *supernatural*, when I say that gracious affections are from those influences that are supernatural."

"From hence it follows that in those gracious affections which are wrought in the midst of the saints through the saving influences of the Spirit of God, there is a new inward perception or sensation of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind from any thing that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified, a sensation or perception,—which could be produced by no exalting, varying, or compounding of that kind of perceptions or sensations which the mind had before. If grace be, in the sense above described, an entirely new kind of principle, then the exercises of it are also entirely a new kind of exercises. And if there be in the soul a new sort of exercises, which no improvement, composition, or management of what it was before conscious of could produce, or any thing like it; then it follows that the mind has an entirely new kind of perception or sensation. And here is, as it were, a new spiritual sense that the mind has, or a principle of a new kind of perception or spiritual sensation, which is in its whole nature as different from any former kinds of sensation of the mind, as tasting is diverse from any of the other senses; and something is perceived by a true saint, in the exercise of this new sense of mind in spiritual and divine things, as entirely diverse from any thing that is perceived in them by natural men, as the sweet taste of honey is diverse from the ideas men have of honey by only looking on it, and feeling it. Hence the work of the Spirit of God in regeneration is often in scripture compared to giving a new sense, giving eyes to see, and ears to hear."

"This new spiritual sense, and the new dispositions that attend it, are no new *faculties*, but are new princi-

ples of nature. I use the word principles, for want of ■ word of a more determinate signification. By a principle of nature in this place, I mean that foundation which is laid in nature, either old or new, for any particular manner or kind of exercise of the faculties of the soul; or a natural habit, or foundation for action, so that for a man to exert the faculties in that kind of exercises may be said to be his nature."

"The Spirit of God in all his operations upon the minds of natural men, only moves, impresses, assists, improves, or in some way acts upon natural principles; but gives no new spiritual principle. So God may greatly assist natural men's reason, in their reasoning about secular things, or about the doctrines of religion, and may greatly advance the clearness of their apprehensions—in many respects, without giving any spiritual sense. So in those awakenings and convictions which natural men may have, God only assists conscience, which is a natural principle, to do that work in a further degree, which it naturally does. And many other ways might be mentioned wherein the Spirit acts upon, assists, and moves natural principles; but after all, it is no more than nature moved, acted upon, and improved; here is nothing supernatural and divine. But the Spirit of God in his influences on the hearts of his saints, operates by infusing or exercising new, divine, and supernatural principles; principles which are indeed a new and spiritual nature, and vastly more excellent than all that is in natural men."

Such is the representation of Edwards, whose views on this subject are, in my apprehension, as nearly conformed to the word of God, as the views of any uninspired writer. According to the infallible rule of our faith, man is naturally in such a state, that all the feelings of a moral nature which arise in his mind, from the beginning to the end of his life, if he continues unrenewed, are sinful. Let him apply his rational powers to the contemplation of divine things, and let his belief be speculatively correct; still he is in such a state, while unregenerate, that those objects of contemplation will excite no holy affections. "The carnal mind," (which is the mind that man has from the beginning, and unceas-

ingly, in his natural state,) “is enmity against God, and is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be.” The truths of religion, taught as clearly and impressively as Jesus himself taught them, and the great motives of religion urged as skilfully and powerfully as he urged them, will originate no right feelings in the unregenerate heart. Though man’s reason may be so improved as to “understand all mysteries and all knowledge;” and though his conscience may be roused from its slumbers, and speak plainly of his sins, and of the judgment to come, and fill him with remorse and fear; yet all this will fail of subduing the stubbornness of his heart, and exciting hatred of sin and love of holiness. His natural kindness, gratitude, and sympathy, and all the amiable affections which belong to him as a social being, may be strengthened and refined; but they will never acquire the quality of holiness. These affections are of a different nature, they stand in a different relation, and are designed for a different end, from that holy affection which is required by the divine law. Though they may be perfect in their kind, and though they may resemble holiness as to outward manifestation; they make no approximation towards it in regard to intrinsic character.

But why may not strong convictions of conscience and a deep sense of obligation to obey God lead a man to abandon sin, and to yield himself to God in love and obedience? Why especially may he not be excited to do this, by being fully satisfied that his own happiness requires it?

In reply to inquiries like these, it is sufficient to state the well known but tremendous fact, that, on the subject of religion, *unconverted men are not governed either by the convictions of their conscience, or by a regard to their future happiness.* If the fact were otherwise; if, in their feelings and conduct, men were governed by conscience, and by a proper regard to their own happiness; how could they be charged with moral depravity? They would be what they ought to be,—heartily inclined to that which is right,—waiting only to know what the law of God and their own eternal welfare require, and ready instantly to do it. What higher praise can any rational creatures deserve, than that they always conform to their

serious convictions as to what is right, and always pursue the course which they know will secure their own eternal well-being? This is what the renewed man begins to do, although, through the remaining sinfulness of his heart, he continually falls short. When he comes to the habit of doing constantly what he knows to be right, and what he knows will contribute to his highest enjoyment through the whole of his existence; he will show that he has experienced the full effect of the divine influence, and that the work of grace is consummated. To bring sinners to conform to the dictates of an enlightened conscience, is the very thing which the Holy Spirit accomplishes in regeneration. To suppose that any sinners do this while unregenerate, is to suppose that they do not need regeneration. The depravity of men shows itself in this very fact, that they cannot be induced to forsake sin either by an awakened conscience, or by a strongly excited desire of future happiness.

On this subject let the appeal be made to Christians. Look back to the time previous to your conversion. Did not your conscience frequently admonish you of the wickedness of living without God, and of your duty to become followers of Christ? Had you not at times a clear and a painful persuasion, that endless misery would be the consequence of your continuing impenitent, and that the only way to secure eternal happiness was to believe in Christ and devote yourselves to his service? But did any such persuasions of your reason, any such convictions of your conscience, any such desires or fears, prove effectual to make you new creatures, and induce you to obey the gospel? Did you not feel it to be your condemnation, that you knew God's will, but did not do it? Did you not discover the alarming fact, that your heart would not yield to God, though urged to it by the solicitations of conscience, the dread of punishment, and the strongest desire of happiness? Were you not thus compelled to see, that your heart was "desperately wicked;" that its disease was so deep and inveterate, that no human means whatever could cure it? And did you not, however reluctantly, come at length to the conclusion, that there was no help for you but in God; that whatever else was done, unless he himself interposed, and by the power of

his Spirit gave you *a new heart*, your case was utterly hopeless? And so, after all that you of yourselves could do, were you not brought, in low prostration of soul, to say; *Lord save me, or I perish*. And when you reflect now upon what you consider to have been the renewal of your heart, can you suppose that it was the natural result of your own endeavors, or of the motives which were placed before you? On the contrary, are you not satisfied, from the most careful review of the whole case, that the change in your moral state was the work of God, and that the actual influence which gospel motives finally had upon you, and your yielding cordial obedience to the divine commands, was owing altogether to the renewing of the Holy Ghost?

Let the appeal be made to you, also, in regard to your *present experience*. Though you have reason to think yourselves renewed; do you not still find the mere convictions of conscience, and the mere desire of happiness, insufficient to subdue the love of sin, and to keep you in the way of holiness? Do you not feel your constant need of an influence, above the mere influence of reason, conscience, and self-love, to preserve you from disobedience, and to make you diligent and faithful? Have you not been taught by sad experience, that your heart is still so deceitful, earthly, and selfish, that you cannot safely trust in it, and cannot calculate upon its readiness to comply with the dictates of conscience, or to do that which you see to be indispensable to your happiness? Is it not more and more manifest to you, that you are not sufficient, of yourselves, to do any thing spiritually good, and that all your sufficiency is of God; that instead of relying upon your own free agency, your own resolutions, the power of conscience, or the power of self-love, your whole reliance must be upon the influence of the Spirit; and that unless the Spirit continually dwells in you, you will certainly be led astray by the corrupt bias of your heart, and relapse into the darkness and pollution of your natural state? Now if the means under consideration have not sufficient power to influence those who are already *sanctified in part*; how can they be supposed sufficient to influence those who are *unconverted, and wholly corrupt*?

But it may be proper to make the appeal more particular respecting the *unconverted*. Do they live in sin, because they are not informed as to its consequences? Do they refuse to repent and believe, because they do not know repentance and faith to be their duty? Do they continue destitute of religion, because they know not that religion is necessary to their happiness, or because their conscience and self-love are asleep? If so, then we should expect, that, as soon as they have the requisite information, and conscience and self-love are awakened, they would forthwith repent and become the followers of Christ. But how far otherwise is it in fact! There are multitudes of unconverted persons, to whom there is no lack of information respecting the truths of religion; whose conscience is awake; who have a strong desire for happiness, and dread of misery, and a full conviction that there is no other way to secure the former and avoid the latter, than to repent of their sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; who yet do not repent and believe. They are in truth the subjects of a moral disorder, which will never be remedied by any mere human means. They have a heart of stone, which nothing short of omnipotence can ever take away. This is a matter of fact; and sinners themselves find it so, when they obtain just views of their own hearts. If any one doubts this, and supposes the heart to be naturally in such a state that it can be gained over to the love of God, *without the renewing of the Holy Ghost*; let him make the trial, either upon his fellow creatures, or upon himself.

As sinners would be most likely to be induced to repent by *self-love, or a regard to their own happiness*; it may be proper to inquire a little farther, whether self-love actually has this influence. It is granted, that there are various natural affections, which are, in themselves, both innocent and useful. But in a depraved moral agent, are not all these innocent affections made subservient to a controlling and supreme affection, which is morally evil? And what is this supreme affection, but selfishness? As the sinner does not love God supremely, it must be that he supremely loves himself. If he were holy, his love for himself would be just, and well regu-

lated, and wholly subservient to his love for God. But self-love, as it actually exists in the sinner, is very different from that affection for himself, which would exist in him if he were holy. It may be called by the same name; but neither in its operations, nor in its relation to character, is it the same thing. Not being accompanied with love to God, the sinner's love for himself becomes supreme, and of course sinful. There never was an unrenewed sinner, who did not so love himself, that he would rather see God's honor sullied, than his own, and be more afflicted to have his own interest injured, than the interest of God's kingdom. And as the ruling affection of his heart is thus in all circumstances at variance with the divine law; how can it originate love to God? Suppose it acquires a high degree of activity and strength. Will it therefore be less inclined or less able to maintain its own supremacy? Or suppose it is for a time weakened and suppressed? Can it have more power to excite love to God, because it is feeble and inactive? In a word, can such a desire for happiness, as an unrenewed sinner has, lead him, by its own influence, to exercise an affection entirely different from any which ever existed in him before, and produce a relish for a kind of enjoyment which before was an object of disgust? Let Christians say, and let the inspired writers say, whether true conversion results from such a cause.

That the renewal of the heart is not the natural result of any of the affections which man possesses, nor of any of the means which he uses in his unregenerate state, but the result of a supernatural operation of divine power, is a truth which is so essential in the Christian system, and which cannot be denied without consequences so hurtful, that it will be proper to adduce a few additional arguments in its support.

Our Saviour says, "No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me, draw him;"—a clear proof of the absolute necessity of divine influence, in order to the exercise of faith. The passage shows that there can be no instance of coming to Christ, except as an effect of the operation of divine power. There must be *the drawing of the Father*.

The same is implied in the provision which God has

made for our renovation. He has introduced a dispensation of grace, an important part of which is, that the Holy Spirit is sent forth to sanctify the heart. But why has God made this special provision, and so emphatically taught us that our renewal to holiness depends upon it, if we have within ourselves all that is necessary to our own renovation?

And what is the account which the sacred writers give of the *change itself*? They teach that Christians are created anew; that they are raised from the dead; that they have a spiritual life, of which they were wholly destitute before; that whereas they were once blind and deaf, they now see and hear; that old things are passed away, and all things become new. These representations are intended to make a strong and vivid impression of the peculiarity and greatness of the change which takes place. And they imply, too, the act of God's power in producing it. For how can it be supposed that such a change results from any thing in man? If we should suppose this, we should quickly find our supposition contradicted by the word of God, and should be taught that our reliance must be, *not on him that willeth, nor on him that runneth, but on God who showeth mercy.*

The doctrine here maintained, may be illustrated by the experience of eminent Christians in all ages. They have spoken of it as a matter of inward conviction, and, in some respects, a matter of consciousness, that the heart is renewed, not by human means, but by the power of God. It may be useful to refer to a few individuals, whose conversion was most distinctly marked, and whose religious experience has been faithfully recorded.

St. Augustine, who lived in the fourth century, will first be mentioned. He had, as he informs us, long and distressing convictions of sin, and under the influence of his natural conscience, fear of punishment, and desire of happiness, was roused to various and earnest efforts; but found himself totally disappointed and baffled by the invincible corruption of his heart, and was at last brought to despair of any relief from his own power.

The next who will be mentioned, is Halyburton; an eminent minister of Scotland, and Professor of Divinity

in the University of St. Andrews, near the beginning of the last century. Dr. Watts, who particularly recommends the biography of this distinguished servant of Christ, says ; “ Here you may see the crooked and perverse workings of a carnal heart in a state of nature, the subtle twinings of the old serpent to keep the soul from God, and all the counter workings of sovereign grace, which in the end appears victorious.” “ The book is valuable,” he says, “ as it contains an account of an evangelical conversion, after the author had long been struggling with sharp convictions of conscience, and laboring long under sharp agonies and terrors. He had been fighting with guilt and corrupt nature, to obtain holiness and peace, by all the methods which the reason of man would naturally suggest, and by the doctrines and duties of the gospel itself, used in a more legal way ; and found his repeated labors all in vain, and his work still to begin.”—“ In these writings, Halyburton describes at large, the utter insufficiency of all convictions, and awakening words and providences, all tears and repentances, all religious duties, public and private, all vows and promises, covenants and bonds ;—and how sin prevailed and triumphed over them all.—All these left him still under the power of sin, and near to despair, till it pleased God to open his eyes to behold the mercy of the gospel, as the way of holiness and peace ; till divine grace brought him—as a dying sinner, *empty of all good, and helpless*, to the full salvation that is in Christ, and sweetly constrained him to receive holiness and peace together.” Watts then adds, “ Though I dare not confine the workings of the blessed Spirit, who is infinitely free and various in his operations, and conforms his workings in many souls to their lower degrees of evangelical knowledge, and to their natural tempers ; yet it is my judgment that such a conversion as this author experienced, is always more frequent where the gospel obtains in its purest light, and its divinest glory.” Thus far the remarks of Watts have been given. The account will be closed with the reflections of Halyburton himself.

“ My exercises,” he says, “ afford me full confirmation of the truths opposed by Pelagians and others, concerning man’s inability to good, and the corruption of his

nature. When I read and hear their high swelling words of vanity, in commendation of man, and in praise of his free will to good,* and when I hear their specious-like arguments,—I have no reason to be shaken. *Will they dispute me out of my senses? May I not believe the word of God?*—Or must I distort the scriptures, to make places which appear unfavorable to their notions of free will, accord with them?—If they will not allow scripture to be its own interpreter, 'tis safer, at least in these things which conscience may know, to admit experience to comment, rather than reason proceeding upon abstract notions.—And where scripture and experience join, there we have the fullest confirmation. As for me, I find more solid truth in that one scripture, which tells us, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*, than in many volumes of idle, anti-scriptural notions, reared upon the subtile arguings of men who have never seen the plague of their own hearts. Woful experience obliges me to acknowledge to my shame, that I never looked towards the Lord's way, except when he drew me. In my natural state, my heart cleaved to what the light of my conscience opposed. Thus I was of them that rebel against the light. When I was brought into a strait, I betook myself to any shift, rather than to Christ. Though the work of my conversion was congruous to reason, it was far above the power of nature. I cannot ascribe its rise or progress to myself; for it was what I sought not, I thought not of, I liked not; yea, it was what I hated, feared, avoided, opposed. I cannot ascribe it to any outward means. The strongest failed—the weakest wrought the effect. But the work was carried on by the secret, indiscernible power of him, who is like *the wind blowing where it listeth*. The word that awakened me, was the voice of him who maketh the dead to hear. The light that shone, was the candle of the Lord, tracing a deceitful and unsearchable heart into all its turnings and windings. The work was the work of one who is every where, and knows every thing. It was *uniform*, though variously carried on through many interruptions, over many oppositions, for a long

* The phrase doubtless meant, *a will free from moral corruption, or from bias to evil*.

time, by means seemingly weak, yea, seemingly improper, and suitable only for him whose ways are in the sea, and whose footsteps are not known. It was a bush burning, but not consumed. It was a spark maintained, though floods continually poured on it to extinguish it. 'This is the Lord's doing, and it is wondrous in our eyes.'

There is hardly any case among Christians which shows more clearly the nature and the cause of the change which takes place in regeneration, and its consequences in a holy life, than the case of David Brainerd. From the account he has given us of his own conversion, we learn that the change which took place in the temper of his mind, was not produced by his own exertions. Probably these exertions were as great, and attended with as strong an excitement of all his faculties and all his natural affections, as in any unrenewed person whatever. And besides this, his endeavors, such as they were, to change his own heart and to bring himself to love God, were made with the advantage of much correct speculative knowledge. Of his conduct soon after he began to feel the importance of religion, he says: "My manner of life was now wholly regular, and full of religion, such as it was; for I read my Bible more than twice through in the course of a year—spent much time every day in prayer, and other secret duties—gave great attention to the word preached, and endeavored to my utmost to retain it." After that, he had an increasing conviction of his sinfulness and danger, and of the difficulty of his conversion. Still he says, "I used to pray and perform other duties with great earnestness, and hoped by diligence and watchfulness soon to gain the point. Sometimes after enlargement in duty, and considerable affection, I hoped I had made a good step towards heaven, and imagined that God would hear such *sincere cries*, as I called them." At a particular time, he set apart a day for secret fasting and prayer, and spent the day in almost incessant cries to God for mercy. Thus he continued for some time to put forth very earnest endeavors to bring himself into a better state of mind; but his endeavors ended in total disappointment. He says, "I saw that these projects were vain, and that I could contrive nothing for my own re-

lief." In this way, he says, he was effectually and experimentally taught, that *there could be no way prescribed, whereby a natural man could, of his own strength, obtain that which is supernatural.* He finally came to a state of mind which he thus describes; "I at once saw that all my contrivances and projects to procure deliverance and salvation for myself, were utterly in vain; I was brought quite to a stand, as finding myself utterly lost. I saw that it was forever impossible for me to do any thing towards helping or delivering myself. I saw that, let me have done what I would, it would no more have tended to my helping myself, than what I had done. I had the greatest certainty that my state was forever miserable, for all that I could do, and wondered that I had never been sensible of it before." It was when he had thus given up all expectation of relief from his own efforts; when he was brought to see himself lost and helpless; when his former feelings were gone, and he had left off all his selfish and resolute endeavors to bring himself into a better state,—it was then, *as he was walking in a dark, thick grove, that unspeakable divine glory seemed to open to the view of his soul.* He says, "it was a new inward apprehension of God, such as I never had before. I stood still, wondered, and admired. My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable, *to see such a God*; and I was pleased and satisfied, that he should be God over all forever and ever. My soul was so captivated with his excellence, loveliness, greatness, and his other perfections, that I was even swallowed up in him. I felt myself in a new world. The way of salvation opened to me with such infinite wisdom, suitableness, and excellence, that I wondered I should ever think of any other way. I was amazed that I had not dropped my own contrivances, and complied with this blessed, excellent way before."

Consider now, the nature and the greatness of the change, which Brainerd experienced; consider the circumstances and the consequences of it; and then say, whether it was the natural result of any of the attributes of character which he possessed, or of the efforts which he made, in his unrenewed state. If it was, then his own consciousness was not worthy to be trusted, and his deep

conviction respecting his own natural state, and the deliberate view which he took of his conversion, were erroneous.

One point will be noticed, which Brainerd maintained very decidedly; namely, that his regeneration was not brought about by the influence of self-love. He was so far from considering his natural self-love as the instrument of his conversion, that he looked upon it as a hindrance. He found that this affection, *as it existed in his unrenewed heart*, was a regard to his own interest, exclusive of all proper regard to God; that it was *supreme love to himself*. He says,—“I saw that self-interest had led me to pray, and that I had never once prayed from any respect to the glory of God.” The self-interest he spoke of was not a worldly interest, but his own safety and happiness in a future state. “I saw,” he says, “that there was no necessary connection between my prayers,” (i. e. the prayers he offered up before conversion,) “and the bestowment of divine grace upon me; that there was no goodness in them, and this because they were not performed from any love to God. I saw that I had been heaping up my devotions, pretending, and sometimes really thinking, that I was aiming at the glory of God; whereas, I never once truly intended it, but my own happiness.” Thus, in his view, self-love, or regard to his own happiness, as it existed and operated in his unsanctified heart, was an obstacle to his salvation, and rendered all the duties prompted by it, unacceptable to God.

And what effect was produced by his correcting his errors, and acquiring more just speculative views of divine things? Not his conversion; not any diminution of his sinfulness. The effect was to disclose the wickedness of his heart, and to make his latent enmity against God visible and active.

The history of the conversions which have taken place in the present age, and in all past ages, confirms the truth of the doctrine, that the renewal of the sinner's heart is effected, not by the efficacy of natural means, but by the supernatural operation of divine power. The more attentively we study this history; and the more we become acquainted with our own hearts, and with the

scriptures ; the more shall we be convinced, that *salvation is of God*. To impress this sentiment indelibly upon the mind, is the object of the extended remarks which have now been made.

The *fourth* position to be taken is, that the power of God in the renewal of sinners is exercised in a *sovereign manner*. By this is meant, that those who are regenerated by divine power, are no more deserving of the favor bestowed upon them, and of themselves no more inclined to turn from their sins, than those who are left to perish. The reason why one man is renewed, rather than others, cannot be found in any attribute of his character, or in any exercise of his understanding, his affections, or his will. Unquestionably, God who is infinitely wise, has a good reason for all that he does. But the reason of his conduct in this case, as in many others, lies concealed in his own mind. He acts according to his own good pleasure, agreeably to the declaration which he made to Moses, and which was quoted by the apostle and applied to this very subject ; *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion*. The same thing is taught in another place, where the apostle says, that *God calls and saves men, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace* ; and in another place still, where he says, that God acts in this matter, *according to the good pleasure of his will*. The representation made in these and other passages, of the manner in which God exercises his power in renewing the hearts of sinners, is suited to destroy the pride of man, and to lay him low in self abasement, and at the same time to secure to the infinite and sovereign God the whole glory of human salvation.

The *fifth* position is, that the act of divine power, by which sinners are renewed, is a *benevolent act*. The same apostle, who so magnifies the *power* of God in our renovation, uses equally strong terms to set forth his *love*. "God," he says, "who is *rich in mercy*, for his *great love* wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, quickened us." And again, "When the *kindness and love* of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have

done, but according to his *mercy* he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." God exercises his power in this work for the purpose of promoting the present and everlasting happiness of men. He first makes them holy, and then fills them with a peace which passeth understanding, and which is a foretaste of the blessedness of heaven.

The act of God's power in renewing the heart is an act of benevolence, not only to those who are renewed, but to others. It conduces to the happiness of God's holy kingdom. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." There is joy too among the saints on earth. By the conversion of sinners, God causes a tide of spiritual joy to roll through his holy empire. And God himself, being infinitely more benevolent than any of his creatures, enjoys a happiness infinitely superior to theirs, in the good which he bestows on the redeemed. In view, then, of the act of God's power in renewing sinners, we may well exclaim, *behold what manner of love!*

Sixth position. In renewing the hearts of sinners, *God exerts his power in a manner perfectly congenial to their nature, as intelligent and moral beings.*

Both reason and scripture teach, that the whole creation is the effect of God's power, and the sphere of his constant operation. But the most important sphere of his operation is *the mind*. This being of far higher moment than the material world, it is proportionably of higher moment that his dominion and control should be extended over it. The sacred writers teach, that God is perfectly qualified, by the glorious attributes of his character, to exercise such a dominion and control, and that he does in fact exercise it; particularly that he exerts an effectual influence in the kingdom of grace, renewing the heart, guiding the thoughts, rectifying the dispositions, and impressing the soul with the divine image. But it is the apprehension of some, that the human mind is in danger of being deprived of its proper agency, and thrown into a disordered state, by such an exercise as has been described, of the infinite power of God upon it or within it. But this apprehension is evidently one which did not occur to the inspired writers.

When they make the strongest representations of the divine power in the renovation of sinners, there is not the least appearance of their having ever thought or suspected, that such an operation of power is at all inconsistent with the intelligent nature of man, or with the perfect exercise of all his rational and moral powers. Infidel philosophers, and others who reason as falsely as they, may think they see an inconsistency; but the prophets and apostles saw none. And there is none in reality. The influence which we exert over our fellow creatures may indeed be such as to interfere with their proper agency, and to derange or shackle their intellectual and moral faculties. The minds of men may be discomposed and agitated and thrown into confusion by their own passions, or by the influence of injudicious or enthusiastical teachers, or the influence of the wicked one. But this effect is never produced by the influence of the Holy Spirit. The more powerful and efficacious that influence, the farther removed are they who experience it from all mental irregularities, and the more perfectly do they attain to intellectual and moral order.

That man's agency is not superseded but directly implied in conversion, is manifest from the consideration that *the change itself*, which one class of texts represent as the effect of divine influence, is represented by another class as *the duty of man*, and is, with divine authority, required of him as his proper work. "Make you a new heart and a new spirit;"—(the very same thing which God promises to give. Ezekiel, xi. 19.) "Repent and be converted." These are only a specimen. And there are other texts which directly assert the agency of those who are converted. Acts, ix. 35. "All who dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and *turned* to the Lord." Acts, xi. 21. "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great multitude *believed* and *turned* to the Lord." 1 Thess. i. 9. "How ye *turned* to God from idols." In the same manner *repentance* is represented as the *act* of the penitent. These representations correspond with the experience of Christians, who are conscious of *repenting*, *believing*, and *turning* to the Lord; conscious of actually performing these duties; not indeed *of themselves*, independently of God, but *as*

influenced by his Spirit. In the affair of repentance or conversion, there are two agents concerned, God and man. God is the supreme *cause* of conversion ; man, the *subject*. God *converts* the sinner ; the sinner, thus influenced, *turns* to God. These two things are as perfectly consistent, as cause and effect in any other case. They neither interfere with each other, nor in the least detract from each other. The divine agency is perfect, and is the effectual cause of the sinner's conversion. While the sinner has, on *his* part, a real, though a dependent agency ; but none the less real, and none the less complete, on account of its dependence ; because that dependence takes away nothing, and obstructs nothing, which belongs to moral agency. He works out his salvation, while God worketh in him both to will and to do. A moral agent has various attributes, such as reason, conscience, affections, and the power of deliberation and choice ; is voluntary ; acts not from constraint, but from the influence of motives. These are the chief. Now the divine agency neither takes away nor diminishes any of these. To say that, if God's agency is the cause of holiness in man, then man cannot be a moral agent, is to say, that man cannot be a moral agent, unless he is *independent* ; that is, unless he ceases to be a *creature*, and acquires the peculiar attributes of the Creator. But if we apply ourselves to the study of the scriptures with Christian candor and with the spirit of prayer, we shall be perplexed with no important difficulty on this subject. We shall clearly see, that while the agency of God in renewing the hearts of sinners is an everlasting honor to his grace, it is perfectly congruous to their intelligent nature, and perfectly consistent with the highest views of their agency.

It is the common, practical sentiment of Christians, that the manner of God's exerting his power in the work of sanctification is such as has now been represented. They never find any thing in their experience, which leads them to think that the influence of the Holy Spirit does the least violence to their moral nature, or that it ever interrupts or suspends their moral agency. How high soever the degree in which the power of God's Spirit has operated on them, they wish to experience its

operations in a still higher degree ; being fully persuaded, that the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit is the only thing which can effectually deliver them from the slavery of sin, and restore their minds to freedom, regularity and vigor. They regard the renewing agency of the Spirit as a blessing of infinite value. They crave it as the life of their souls. Instead of setting limits to the divine influence which they would have exercised over their minds, they wish that all their dispositions, habits, thoughts, desires, active principles, faculties, yea, their whole character and state, may be constantly moulded, directed, and swayed by the almighty energy of God's Spirit. To that divine energy they yield themselves up without reserve, aspiring after higher and higher measures of it. They desire this healing, purifying influence to be exercised, not *out of* their minds, but, where it is needed, *within* their minds ; and far from fearing that such an exercise of omnipotence, or the new spiritual affection which it imparts, may infringe their own agency, they feel that they never shall have any right agency without it, and that the mightiest operations of divine power will produce no other effect, than to remedy their spiritual diseases, and adorn them with the beauties of holiness.

Seventh position. In the work of regeneration, God exerts his power in a manner perfectly consistent with the use of proper means. Indeed the means which God has appointed, are not only consistent with the special influence of the Spirit, but, when made effectual, they always evince the necessity of that influence, and illustrate its greatness. The means of conversion and sanctification are included in *divine truth*. Now when divine truth takes effect, it enlightens the minds of men, and, among other things, shows them the dreadful fact, that they are dead in trespasses and sins ; that they are naturally averse to the holy service of God, and that this aversion is so strong, that it will never be overcome, except by that divine power which raised Christ from the dead. They learn, that the necessity of their being *renewed* arises from their natural depravity, and that the necessity of *divine power* to renew them, arises from the fact that their opposition to that which is good is so deep-rooted

and obstinate, that no human means can ever subdue it. But this conviction of the desperate wickedness of the heart is not the only effect of divine truth. When the sinner is *renewed*, the character of God and other spiritual objects, which before excited his aversion, excite all the variety of holy affections. And this is the same as to say, that divine truth, attended with the renewing influence of the Spirit in the heart of the sinner, is the means of bringing him to love God, to repent of sin, and to believe in Christ. No one, who makes the Bible his rule, can suppose, that the fittest means will ever be successful in turning men from sin to holiness, unless those means are accompanied with the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. But when thus accompanied, they will be successful. The divine character, as exhibited in the word of God, is perfectly deserving of the supreme love of all men; and it would universally excite their love, were it not for the desperate wickedness of their hearts. It is this, and this only, which prevents. It is in consequence of this deep depravity of the heart, that the preaching of the gospel and other means have no good effect upon sinners, *without the special influence of the Spirit*. But *with* that influence, they become efficacious. This is the common doctrine of evangelical Christians. *In accomplishing the work of renovation, God ordinarily makes use of means, giving them efficacy by his own gracious influence on the heart.* "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth." James, i. 18. Means are commonly used with sinners *before* they are renewed; and we well know what is the effect. Means are used with them, that is, divine truth in various ways is held up before them, *when* they are renewed; and then, the heart being influenced by the divine Spirit, the effect of the means used is the exercise of holy affection. Thus sinners are "born again of the word of God," and "begotten through the gospel." The word of God is the means of their renewal, the power which makes it effectual residing in God. This is the doctrine taught by experience, as well as by the scriptures. Accordingly we can have no ground to expect success in using means for the conversion of sinners, except from the special operation of the Spirit. But in this way we have ample ground

to expect it. And an expectation of success, resting, not upon any independent efficacy of divine truth, but upon the influence of the Spirit, will most powerfully prompt us to use the appointed means. When we feel most deeply, that neither he who planteth nor he who watereth is any thing, but God who giveth the increase, we shall have the strongest incitement to diligence and perseverance in planting and watering. On the contrary, the sentiment, that we must look for success to our own efforts, or to the mere influence of the truth upon the unrenewed heart, would lead to utter discouragement and despondency. Were this our only dependence, we should expect to be forever compelled to say, *Lord, who hath believed our report?*

Finally : how manifest is the propriety and importance of *fervent prayer to God*, that he would grant the influence of his Spirit for the renewal of sinners. As he is the gracious Author of that saving change, we should gratefully and devoutly acknowledge him as such. And he has promised to accomplish this work in answer to the prayers of his people, all our regard to his glory, and to the salvation of immortal souls should move us to earnest and unceasing prayer, that he would vouchsafe to sinners the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. The Lord grant, that his people may have just and adequate conceptions of their dependence for the sanctification of their hearts and their holy enjoyments, on the power of his Spirit ; and that all his ministers, being guided by wisdom from above, may hold forth this momentous doctrine in its true light, giving it the same prominence, and the same relation to other doctrines, which it has in the sacred scriptures ; so that the Holy Spirit may be duly honored, and his blessed influences extended far and wide.

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THE BIBLE THE ONLY SURE TEST

OF

RELIGIOUS CHARACTER.

[BY REV. LEONARD WOODS, D. D.]



IF a man wishes to ascertain whether he has a title to an estate, which has been left by a rich relative, he searches the laws of the land respecting inheritance. He examines the interpretations which have been given of those laws, in the writings of the ablest jurists, and in the decisions of courts of justice. He diligently inquires into all the circumstances of the case, and into all the conditions with which it may be necessary for him to comply in order to secure the possession of the estate. In this business he proceeds with great zeal, and without any delay. The interest which he has in the subject urges him on to complete the examination seasonably, so that if his title is clear, he may have the pleasure of anticipating the property, and may adopt every measure which wisdom dictates in order to obtain the possession of it.

But what is the largest estate on earth, compared with the heavenly inheritance? And what is the care and diligence which we ought to exercise in order to secure any earthly good, compared with that which we ought to exercise, to make sure our title to *the inheritance of the saints in light*?

But how are we to determine, *whether we have a title to that inheritance*? Clearly, we must do this by ascertaining what are the qualifications of those who are entitled to it, and whether those qualifications belong to us. This is the business of *self-examination*;—a business of vast moment to all Christians, though often neglected; and when not entirely neglected, often performed without due regard to the proper test of character. No language

is adequate to describe the evils which result either from the omission of self-inquiry, or from an attempt to perform the duty while the rule of judgment is overlooked.

This general subject is often well explained and forcibly inculcated by Christian preachers and Christian writers. The remarks in this Tract will be directed to a particular point, and that, one of great practical importance; namely; *that in the whole business of examining ourselves, and judging of religious character, we should make the word of God our rule.*

A little consideration will make it manifest, that the word of God is *the only safe rule.* Neither the opinions of the world, nor the character of Christians, nor the particular experience of those around us, nor any views which we might be led to entertain of the nature of religion by our own reasoning, or by our own feelings, can be a safe standard. The prevailing opinions of the world, so far from being certainly right, are likely to be wrong; because the world lieth in darkness. Even Christians are all very imperfect; and their faults frequently more visible than their excellencies; so that measuring ourselves by them would certainly expose us to mistakes. As to the religious experience of those around us,—it may be true and saving, or it may be false and delusive. At best, it will be a mixed experience. And unless we have some higher rule of judgment, how shall we be able to separate the true from the false, the wheat from the chaff. If we judge of ourselves by what we know of the experience of others, we shall be in danger of setting a high value upon that which is worthless, and a low value upon that which constitutes the very essence of religion. Who is able to form a safe and perfect standard of judgment in regard to religious character, but that Being, whose knowledge is infinite, and who is therefore liable to no mistake? Who but God perfectly knows the nature of the kingdom of heaven, and the necessary qualifications of those who shall be admitted into it? If any man should undertake by his own wisdom, without divine teaching, to make out a description of the qualifications which the heirs of heaven must have, he would undoubtedly fall into various errors; and his errors would misguide all those who looked to him as a stand-

ard. A rule of judgment, on which we can safely rely, must be formed by God himself, or by those who enjoy his infallible guidance. If we faithfully attend to a rule, formed in this way, we may expect that the conclusions which we adopt, will be according to truth, and will stand forever.

Another reason, and one of great moment, for making the word of God our rule of judgment respecting character, is, *that this is to be the rule of judgment at the last day*. Christ himself has expressly informed us, that the word which he spake shall judge us at the last day. In matters of a civil nature, we search for those laws and precedents which are to be the rule of judgment. In special cases, we search again and again, and ask the counsel of those who possess superior skill, so that we may determine as exactly as possible, what will be the decision of the court of justice, and may govern ourselves accordingly. Such a mode of proceeding is in the highest degree important with respect to our *spiritual* concerns. Our state for eternity is to be decided at the last day; and God has graciously informed us, that his word is to be the rule of judgment. To determine then how our character will appear at the last day, it is only necessary that we should try ourselves faithfully by the word of God. If we try ourselves by any rule less elevated and less strict than this, we may indeed be led to cherish a hope of future happiness; but the hope may be one which shall perish forever. And who would wish for a hope, built on delusion? The painfulness of the final disappointment must be far more than an overbalance for all the pleasure which can now be derived from such a delusion. And besides this, the indulgence of a delusive hope is, of all things, the most likely to prevent us from obtaining that hope which is sure and steadfast.

This is a subject of most serious interest to all the heirs of immortality. When in our seasons of reflection, the momentous inquiry arises in our minds, *whether we have a title to the kingdom of heaven*; it is infinitely important, that we should repair directly to the word of God, and judge of our character and prospects by that sure standard. Many of the books which have been written by learned and pious men on the nature and evidences of

religion, exhibit the truth with clearness and fidelity, and may be consulted with great profit. But they should never be substituted for the word of God. Nor should any works of human origin be so used, as to diminish in our view the importance of scripture, or in any degree to withdraw our attention from it. Religious books should be calculated to raise our esteem for the Bible, and to aid us in understanding its instructions, and in applying them to our own case. If they have a different influence, they are not only useless, but hurtful.

In a general view, what has now been said of the *propriety* and *importance* of making the word of God our rule of judgment respecting character, may be sufficient. But as this is a subject on which inadequate and erroneous apprehensions are often entertained, it is desirable to make the rule itself as plain and obvious as possible. For this purpose, a few passages of scripture will be selected, in which the nature and evidences of true religion are brought into view professedly, and with more than ordinary prominence and fulness; and then, instead of referring to the Bible generally, we shall, for the present, refer definitely to these prominent passages as our rule; still keeping in mind, that the other texts which relate to the same subject, are to be treated in the same manner.

We begin with the Decalogue; *Exod. xx. 3—17.* These ten precepts, written on tables of stone by the finger of God, show what are those affections and actions which God requires of us. They are contained summarily, as Christ teaches us, in these two commands. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

The next passage to be quoted, points out our particular duty as sinners. *Mark i. 15.* Jesus preached, *Repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

We next refer to a place, where Christ undertakes, with a striking particularity, to delineate the peculiar traits of character which belong to his disciples.

Matt. v. 3—9. Blessed are the poor in spirit.—Blessed are they that mourn.—Blessed are the meek.—Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteous-

ness.—Blessed are the merciful.—Blessed are the pure in heart.—Blessed are the peace-makers.—Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Isa. lxvi. 2. To this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.

Matt. v. 44. I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.

In Matt. vi. 5—13, Christ gives his disciples the most particular directions as to the spirit and manner of their devotions.

Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.—After this manner therefore pray ye; Our Father, who art in heaven, &c.

John, xiv. 13, 21. If ye love me, keep my commandments.—He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.

John, xiii. 35. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.

1 Peter, ii. 7. Unto you who believe, Christ is precious.

Rom. viii. 9. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Luke, ix. 23. And Jesus said to them all; If any man will come after me, let him deny himself daily, and follow me.

John, xvi. 8. And when the Holy Spirit is come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

John, iii. 3. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee; except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

2 Cor. v. 17. Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.

Gal. ii. 19, 20. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in

no such doctrine is found in any other book in the world

me ; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.

Gal. v. 22, 23, 24. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.—And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

1 Cor. xiii. 4—7. *Charity [love] suffereth long and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

1 Cor. x. 31. *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

As the passages here selected are very intelligible, and as they are among the principal ones relating to Christian character ; they will be sufficient for our present purpose. So far then as these leading texts are concerned, we see clearly what is our rule of judgment, and what sort of inquiries we are to make, in order to determine whether we are Christians. Do we conform in any measure to the holy precepts which were written on tables of stone by the finger of God ? Do we love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbors as ourselves ? Have we repented of sin and turned from it ? Have we been born again ? Have we become new creatures ? Have we been convinced of sin ? Do we believe in Christ, as he is set forth in the gospel ? Is he precious to us ? Is the same mind in us which was in him ? Are we dead to all hopes of salvation by the law ? Are we crucified with Christ ; and is our life a life of faith in him ? Do we deny ourselves daily ? Have we the fruit of the Spirit as described by the apostle, and the marks of discipleship as described by our Saviour ? Have we that love which suffereth long and is kind ; which vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ? Are we poor in spirit ? Do we mourn with the mourning of penitents ? Are we meek and merciful ? Do we hunger and thirst after righteousness ? Are we peace-makers ? Are we pure in heart ?

Do our prayers answer to the pattern which Christ gave ? Do we forgive and love our enemies, and do them good, and pray for them ? Do we show our love to Christ by keeping his commandments ? Do we eat, and drink, and do all things to the glory of God ?—These questions bring into view the chief standard of character, and the chief evidences of piety. When the judgment day comes, we shall stand or fall, as we are conformed, or not, to this rule.

The practice of making the word of God our rule, as here recommended, would produce the most desirable and important effects.

1. *It would have an influence highly favorable to the character of Christians, through their whole course.* If they judge themselves by any other rule, the various evils of their hearts, and the faults which cleave to their characters, may be and probably will be in a great measure concealed from their view. But the word of God sheds clear and penetrating light on their whole character, even on the most secret springs of action ; helps them to discover what is wrong, and how much remains to be done in the work of sanctification. If men stop where they are when they are first renewed, the great object of divine grace in their renewal, either as to their character, their usefulness, or their enjoyment, cannot be attained. But if they constantly look into the Bible as their directory, and there learn what they are, and what they ought to be ; and if they labor to conform in all respects to that perfect standard ; they will grow in grace, and be constantly rising towards the stature of perfect men in Christ. The faults which are found in Christians, and which occasion so much injury to their cause, are undoubtedly owing more or less to their substituting something else in the place of holy writ, as the rule of their practical judgment. While they are satisfied with a false or defective standard, they will be satisfied with a false or defective piety. It is a fact well known, and often recognized, that those Christians who have paid the most scrupulous attention to the word of God as the standard of character, have attained to the highest degree of moral excellence. They have been the most humble and penitent ; because they have seen the most clearly how small the measure of

their holiness, and how many their failings and sins. The pride of their hearts has been continually mortified, by looking at themselves in the light of God's holy word. They have had the strongest faith in Christ; because they have had the deepest conviction of their own sinfulness, and misery, and helplessness, and the clearest views of his glory and fulness. They have been the most sincere and fervent in prayer; because, by making the scriptures their rule, they have become the most deeply sensible of their poverty, and of the abundance of blessings which they need,—the most sensible too, that no one, but God, can bestow these blessings upon them, and particularly that they must trust in his grace alone, to supply what is wanting in their Christian character; and thus they have been brought to feel a strong attachment to the throne of grace, and to be importunate and persevering in prayer. Such Christians have been the most obedient to the divine commands, the most active in doing good, the most patient and submissive under trials; because the word of God has most effectually taught them, that such obedience, activity, and submission is a reasonable service, and is to be regarded as the very substance of practical religion, and the grand proof of regeneration.

2. *The diligent and faithful use of the word of God, as the rule of judgment, would have an influence peculiarly important in regard to those, who have just begun to attend to the subject of religion.*

Take the case of a *sudden conversion*. One who has long lived in thoughtless security, and has perhaps been an opposer of religion, is to-day awakened from his slumbers, and in a very short time he thinks himself a Christian. He is surprised and delighted at the sudden change which has taken place in his feelings; is full of gratitude, and rejoices in hope. Now, adhering conscientiously to the word of God as our rule, how are we to proceed in regard to such a case? So far as the person gives evidence of right views and feelings, though for only a few hours or minutes, we are to regard him in a favorable light, and to indulge a hope that the sovereign grace of God has visited his soul. And there may perhaps be as much evidence of this, as the shortness of the

time will permit. But may we unhesitatingly and confidently pronounce him *converted*? Suppose we do this; and then suppose, what too often takes place, that in a few days, or a few months, he loses his religious impressions, returns to his follies and sins, and is in all essential points as he was before,—except perhaps that his proud selfish heart may show itself in a different way. Do we now pronounce him a convert? No. We begin to doubt. The good opinion we had of his character we fear was a mistake; and we regret it that we expressed so unqualified an opinion in his favor, especially as our opinion may have led him to think well of himself, and so helped to confirm his delusion. Let us then go back, and see where the error lay. Did not our great mistake evidently consist in our neglecting to make the word of God our rule? Would not a faithful adherence to this have been all that the case required? We will now endeavor to go over the subject again, with a strict regard to the rule. The person shows a sudden alteration in his mind, and says, he repents and believes. What shall we say of such a case? and how shall we treat it? Reply. If he *truly* repents and believes, he is a Christian, renewed, pardoned, and entitled to heaven. But his *saying* that he does this can be no certain proof that he really does it; because he may say it *insincerely*. Nor is his *thinking* that he truly repents and believes, a certain proof that he really does so; because the heart is deceitful above all things, even more deceitful than the deceitful tongue; and by such a heart he may be led to judge erroneously respecting himself. It is clear then, that if we would exercise a sober mind, and keep on scripture ground, we must not undertake to judge any farther than evidence will warrant; that is, we must avoid a *hasty* judgment. And a judgment, which rests on a person's expressions or appearance for a short time, must, in ordinary cases, be hasty; because ordinarily a short time is not sufficient to exhibit such evidence, as may safely be made the ground of judgment. The feelings, and words and actions of a professed convert may be owing to other causes, than the renewing of the Holy Spirit. We must wait then, patiently wait, to see whether he brings forth fruit meet for repentance; i. e., such fruit as naturally

springs from repentance, and proves it sincere. Look at the passages of scripture above quoted, which exhibit the prominent traits of Christian character, and you will see that it is impossible to judge in an hour or a day, whether those traits belong to a particular person. How can he give evidence that he repents and believes, before he has time to show the operations and fruits of repentance and faith?—or that he has the law of God written in his heart, before he shows by his actions that he is obedient? In order to make it manifest that he is humble, contrite, poor in spirit, meek, patient, forgiving, diligent in doing good, and fervent in prayer, he must have time, opportunities, occasions, trials. From the nature of the case, the evidence of piety must be gradual. A small degree of evidence may be exhibited the first day or hour of a man's religious life; and we may have a small degree of hope,—a hope proportionate to the degree of evidence. But it would be contrary to scripture, contrary to reason and sound judgment, and a sign of rashness, for us to make up our minds confidently respecting a person's conversion, or to speak confidently of it to others, when he has had opportunity to give but slight and dubious evidence of conversion. We must therefore check the spirit of impatience and haste; must guard against all excitements, inconsistent with reason; and must suspend our opinion, till he makes it appear by his life, that he has the marks of a Christian. Nothing can be more obvious, than that men will ordinarily be liable to mistake, if they take upon them to speak decisively as to the conversion of another person, or to judge decisively as to their own, on the ground of what may take place in a short time.

A man is suddenly waked up to the importance of religion. Seeing himself to be a sinner, under condemnation, he is distressed and agitated. But on hearing the messages of divine mercy, and the offers of free pardon, he is filled with inexpressible rapture, *resolves* to be a Christian, cries, "Glory to God," exults in the hope of heaven, and makes it his *purpose* to serve Christ. Now many at the present day look upon such appearances as satisfactory evidence of a saving change, and, without any qualification, speak of the person who exhibits them,

as *converted*. But is this according to truth?—Is it agreeable to the dictates of Christian wisdom? What real evidence is there, that the person above described has been savingly converted? Does the evidence consist in the sudden waking up of the mind to the things of religion?—in the consciousness of guilt?—in fear, and distress, and agitation? We learn from the scriptures, that these things afford no conclusive evidence of conversion. Is evidence found in the rapturous joy which is excited by the offer of pardon, and by the hope of happiness in heaven? The slightest acquaintance with the nature of man teaches, and the word of God teaches more fully, that such joy is altogether equivocal, as it has in ten thousand instances sprung from a selfish and deluded heart, and may spring from the same source in the case before us. There is nothing of more dubious import, than the feeling and utterance of such rapturous joy.

But is not joy among the fruits of the Spirit? Yes, true joy is so. But we learn from the Bible, that there is a joy which is false, growing out of a deceived heart. We have to determine then, whether the joy which is excited in the individual before us, is true or false; and we must do this by a careful reference of the case to our infallible standard. We must endeavor to ascertain whether he has any spiritual knowledge of God, any conviction of ill-desert and vileness, any cordial hatred of sin, any faith in the Saviour; whether he is humble, and of a contrite spirit; whether he pants after holiness, denies himself, forgives and loves his enemies, is like Christ, and has respect to all the divine precepts. These, according to the Bible, are the main points. Any one of these is far more important, and ought to be far more insisted upon, as an evidence of regeneration, than the highest transports of joy.

Is the fact, that the individual referred to expresses a *hope* respecting himself, any decisive evidence of his conversion? We cannot admit this; because the scriptures teach us that there is a false hope, as well as a true. Instead therefore of pronouncing unhesitatingly and confidently that the person is converted, because he has a hope, we have to ascertain whether his hope is a true

Christian hope. And to do this, we must wait for the evidence of repentance, faith, love, and other characteristics of the believer, as described in the places above cited. And this again, will require time, and care, and patient observation, and a frequent suspension of our judgment. And how can any one, unless he is of an impatient, rash spirit, object to this mode of proceeding, considering that it is of no kind of importance in any respect, that we should form a judgment at once ; and considering especially, that a judgment formed on mistaken grounds, whether in regard to ourselves or others, will stand for nothing at the last day, and will tend, more than almost any other cause, to injure and ruin the soul.

I have said that *time* is necessary. The very nature of the rule above exhibited makes this evident. For how can the rule be applied to any one, as a test of character, except as his character is made visible by his conduct ? If we were omniscient, we could look directly into the heart, see all the secret springs of action, and pass sentence upon the character at once, without any danger of mistake. But as we can know men only by their fruits, we must wait for the fruits to appear. When we see blossoms upon a tree, we may hope for fruit, and may hope that the fruit will be good, and thus prove the tree to be good. But before we can actually judge as to the goodness of the tree, we must see and examine the fruit ; and to do this, we must take time. Without time, it is impossible to determine, that any one has a character which answers to the requisitions of God's holy word.

As to the individual above introduced, there is one more inquiry. Is it a satisfactory evidence of his conversion, that he *resolves to be a Christian*, or that it is his *purpose henceforth to act on the Lord's side* ? Answer. If his resolution springs from right motives, and is sincere and pious, it is one sign of conversion ; though not one which is most frequently insisted upon in the word of God. But how shall we know at once, that his resolution or purpose is sincere and pious ? How can he give us evidence of this, but by acting out the Christian temper, and by showing that his character agrees, in some good measure, with the infallible rule of judgment, above presented from the word of God ? Suppose, what is often

■ fact, that he who says, it is his *purpose* to be a Christian, manifests no conviction of the evil of sin, or of the desperate wickedness of his heart, no humility, no self-aborrence, no contriteness of spirit, no readiness to make confession, no sense of his own weakness and insufficiency, and no cordial reliance on the grace of Christ. Is he still to be regarded as a *Christian*, because he says he *resolves* to be one? Or suppose his resolution appears in all respects as we should wish, serious, humble, pious, the fruit of a renewed heart; but after a while, his excitement passes away, and he manifests the same heart as before. He shows that he loves the world, and that religion is not his element. Is that *purpose* which he formed to be a Christian still to be viewed as an evidence of conversion? No. Such a purpose and resolution may be made a thousand times over, and with great apparent seriousness, but without any true love to God in the heart, or any holy fruits in the life. So that the great question is not, whether a man in any way *resolves* to be a Christian, but *how* he resolves. What is the state of mind from which his purpose springs, and what influence has it on his life? To determine whether his *resolution* is any evidence of piety, we must bring both him and his resolution to the sure test. Has he the traits of character which are so plainly delineated in the places above selected? To answer this question properly, is not the business of a moment. And if any one does answer it in a moment, he may quickly see reason to reverse his answer. Or if not, it may still be reversed at the judgment day.

Finally; it is perfectly manifest, that great care and caution are necessary, if we would form a judgment respecting the conversion of sinners, according to the rule of God's word. But this care and caution should be joined with great affection and tenderness; and with a disposition to encourage all that is right, and to hope well of all who begin to attend in earnest to the one thing needful. So far as they appear to love the truth, and to be of a penitent, humble, and docile spirit, we should think favorably of them, and heartily thank God for his goodness; still remembering, that as we cannot search the heart, we must know them by their fruits, and must

wait to see what the fruits are. This mode of forming a judgment, whether respecting ourselves or others, is attended with obvious advantages, without any disadvantages. If a man is truly converted, it will be no injury to him to suspend his judgment awhile as to his own state, and to wait till he has opportunity to see what his habitual feelings and actions are. It will do him no hurt, but probably much good, for his *friends* to wait awhile, to see whether he lives like a Christian. It will do no hurt to a revival of religion, but will rather be an evidence that the revival is the work of God, to have it universally understood and deeply felt, that *the heart is deceitful above all things*, and that no man can expect to come to a decision agreeable to the rule of God's word, either respecting his own character, or the character of others, without some opportunity for the application of the rule, and the trial of character. This principle, well fixed in the mind, would promote watchfulness, self-inquiry, prayer, and a diligent endeavor to know and do God's will, among those who are setting out in a religious course. It would make them jealous over one another, and especially over themselves, with a godly jealousy. It would fix in their minds the important sentiment, that religion is no sudden start, no excitement of animal feeling, no fire quickly kindled and quickly extinguished, but a sanctified disposition of heart, an active, holy, and durable principle, influencing the life. And the natural consequence of this sentiment would be, that they would indulge and express no more confidence that they have religion, than they would be warranted to do by its fruits, appearing in their conduct. Making the word of God the only standard of religion, and of religious character, would be the direct way to detect hypocrisy, to prevent delusion, to discourage false, enthusiastic affections, and to preserve order and purity in the church. And it would have the peculiar effect to render Christians sensible of their insufficiency for the work to which they are called, and of their constant need of divine aid, and would produce in them a cordial reliance on the grace of God. If we set up a religion which varies essentially from the scripture rule,—a religion which consists in the stirring of the passions, or in the efforts of mere self-love, and which comes within

the reach of the unrenewed heart; we can easily exercise such a religion *of ourselves*. We are perfectly adequate to it, without any special divine help. For who needs special divine help to enable him to deceive himself, and to indulge the hope of the hypocrite? Who has any occasion to rely upon the grace of God, in order to the exercise of a proud, selfish, false religion? But let a man set up before him a religion which agrees with the word of God, particularly with those prominent passages quoted above; and let him make it the great object of his desires and efforts to cultivate such a religion, and to exhibit all its lovely fruits; and he will quickly learn that his strength is weakness. He will find that the practice of true religion is totally against the natural dispositions of his heart; that it requires constant self-denial, a constant struggle against the law in his members, a constant endeavor to subdue and mortify his corrupt heart; that it must involve him in an endless warfare against hostile powers without and within. The labor he undertakes is arduous. The travel is all the way up-hill, and frequently up very steep ascents. Every one who truly enlists in this work, will quickly find, and will find with increasing clearness as he proceeds, that he is exceedingly weak and insufficient, and that his help must come from the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Believing, as all Christians do, that the scripture is the only safe and infallible rule, we ought so to regard it in our practice. When we go to our places of retirement to commune with our own hearts, and to examine ourselves; we have to do with nothing as a rule of judgment, but the word of God. Away, then, ye false imaginations, dreams, passionate excitements, and mental convulsions. "To the law and to the testimony." This is our standard. And the right application of this standard to our own case requires the tranquillity and stillness which we enjoy in retirement. Here the all-important question arises; *are we Christians?* We cannot trust to the opinion of our friends. They look only on the outward appearance. We go directly to our Statute Book, our sure guide. We ask for the *old paths*, where is the *good way*? We turn to one and another passage of holy writ, particularly to the passages above quoted, and others of like kind; for it

is best to have particular passages before our eyes, at one time this, and at another time that. Then, looking to God for the guidance of his Spirit, we inquire whether the traits of character thus presented to view, are ours. If we can stand the trial of God's word, faithfully applied, we are Christians, heirs of eternal life. If not, we shall be cast away as dross. The word of God which we receive as our rule, is immutable. Other things change and pass away; but this *abideth forever*. The world, especially at the present day, is full of inventions. The active, restless mind of man is ever seeking after something new; and in worldly matters there are many new things which are of great value. But there is no such thing as *a new religion*, or *a new way to heaven*. All that which deserves the name of religion, and which will be approved at the final judgment, agrees with the standard which was settled eighteen hundred years ago. In this standard there can be no alteration; of course there can be none in that religion which is conformed to it. All the true religion which will exist in our country and in the world during the present year, and the present generation, whether commencing in revivals or not, and all which will exist to the end of the world, will be just such religion as our Saviour describes in his sermon on the mount, and just such as Paul describes, when he tells us what are the fruits of the Spirit, and such as is described in the various passages above cited, and in other passages of scripture relating to the same subject. If we possess this religion, we are happy here and hereafter. If not, whatever our present appearances and hopes, we have no part or lot among the heirs of heaven.

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DUTIES OF PARENTS.



THE Old Testament closes with a prophecy which, in the New, is applied to John the forerunner of Christ. He was to come, to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers," lest the Lord should "come and smite the earth with a curse." This points to the true way of promoting a reformation, and averting the judgments of heaven. It must be through the influence of parents. Their hearts must be turned towards their children, in deep solicitude for their welfare. And the hearts of the children must be turned towards their parents, in a readiness to receive their instructions, and to profit by them. Parents occupy a station of great responsibility; and it is desirable that they should have a solemn sense of it, and be persuaded to do what they can for the best good of their children. It is designed, in this tract, to lay before parents some considerations which should prompt them to make exertions for the benefit of their children; and then, to point out some things which parents can do, that would be greatly for their children's benefit.

1. Children are formed by education. It is not denied that there is some difference in children naturally, owing to difference of constitutional temperament. But, it is believed, that, difference of early training makes the grand difference which is observable in after life. God has said, "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." And to the

parent who neglects to do this, he says, "seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children." No miracle needs to be supposed here; for it accords with universal experience and observation, that education forms the mind, and gives a stamp to the character. Human beings do not come to maturity at once. They form their habits by slow degrees, and acquire their modes of thinking and acting, from what they learn. Knowledge is not born with them; it is taught them by others. Parents, teachers, companions, and all with whom they have intercourse, contribute, more or less, to form their minds, and give a direction to their pursuits. Circumstances, apparently fortuitous, often have great influence; and, if not carefully observed and diligently counteracted, they sometimes give to the character a strong bias, which is most unhappy in its tendency. The scenes which children witness, the conversation they hear, the books they read, all contribute their share of influence. It is not meant to deny that children are the subjects of native depravity. All systems of education, based on the contrary assumption, will be sure to end in disappointment. The admission of the fact, however, only goes to show, still more forcibly, the necessity of such training as shall tend to counteract the native propensity to evil. Nor is it meant that parents can, by any direct agency of their own, renew the hearts of their children. This must be done, if it ever is done, by the agency of the Holy Spirit. But it is meant, that, when you become parents, your children are committed to your care, to be trained up for their final destiny; and that, according to the means which you shall use, their character will be ordinarily determined, and their final destiny fixed. It is according to the ordinary laws of cause and effect, as proved by experience and observation, that your children shall be what you train them to be; and that their character will receive its decisive stamp from your care and attention, or take its distinctive features in a different way, from your remissness and neglect.

2. You ought to feel deeply concerned for the best good of your children. The relation you sustain to them imposes this obligation upon you. Why are they com

mitted to your care, but that you may care for them? Why has God allowed you to occupy the station of parents, but that you should be bound to fulfil its duties? Who shall care for them, if you do not? They are not capable of taking care of themselves. In their tender years, they cannot provide even for the common wants of a single day. Much less are they capable of discerning what their best interests require, for the whole of their future existence. They are ignorant and helpless. You have been instrumental of bringing them into the world, and of giving them an existence which shall never end. They are immortal beings, placed here to form a character for eternity. And they are placed under your care, that they may form that character under your influence, and have their eternal destiny fixed by your attention or neglect. Can you look with indifference on the fearful responsibility which you have thus taken upon yourselves? You cannot shake off that responsibility, if you should wish to do it. You must meet your children at the bar of God. You must behold them forever in the realms of bliss, or in the regions of despair. And you must witness forever the effects which have resulted from your present treatment of them. But, it need not be supposed that you are destitute of the common feelings of humanity. You love your children; and feel concerned for their present comfort. You cannot neglect their present wants, nor willingly see them suffer for a single hour. And you feel, probably, quite enough concerned as to what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewith they shall be clothed. And it may be that you feel sufficiently concerned to have them successful in the world, and prosperous in their temporal affairs. But food and drink and clothing are not the extent of their wants. Neither wealth nor honor will make them happy. Real enjoyment depends upon the mind; and the mind is formed by education. Their comfort in this world requires the same course of training which is necessary to their happiness in the world to come. Of the means necessary to train them for heaven, not a single particular can be neglected, without a proportionate sacrifice of their comfort here. And you cannot act the part of affectionate parents, if you do not consider the future, as well as the

present, and let all the measures you adopt, be regulated by a regard to the best good of your children both in this life and in the life to come.

3. You ought to regard the influence your children will have upon others. Mankind are made for society. No man lives to himself alone. His influence is felt by all with whom he has intercourse. Even when he does not aim at exerting an influence upon others, it may not be less sensibly felt. If his mind is so formed that he can be happy himself, he will contribute to the happiness of others. But if his training has been such as to render him incapable of any real comfort himself, he will be perpetually destroying the comfort of those around him. He will often be likely to do it by design, in order to gratify his own selfish feelings. And he will often do it when he has no such design; the bare sight of wretchedness in one person being sufficient to make others wretched by sympathy. If your child is trained up in the way he should go, he will be capable of doing great good in the world, and he will not be deficient in the disposition to do it. If he is taught to practice according to the rule of our Lord, to do unto others as he would have others do unto him, he will greatly contribute to the peace and good order of the community to which he belongs. But if he is taught to be wholly selfish in his aims, and to sacrifice the good of others whenever it stands in his way, he will be a disturber of the peace, and a promoter of discord and confusion. Have you not sometimes seen an individual, who has been trained to habits of benevolence and kindness, who has been taught to regard the good of the public more than his own, who has gained an extensive influence in the world, and exerted it with the happiest effect, in promoting every object of public utility, and after a long life of usefulness, has gone down to the grave followed by the blessings of succeeding generations? Is it not desirable that your children should be such? On the other hand, have you never seen an individual, who has been trained to habits of selfishness, who has no fear of God, nor regard for the comfort of others, but has some quickness of intellect and plausibility of address, and has learned to scoff at serious things, and laugh to scorn all scruples of conscience?

Have you not seen him gain an influence over the inexperienced and unthinking, and become but too successful in seducing them far from the paths of virtue, and plunging them into the vortex of dissipation and vice, thus blasting the hopes of many an affectionate parent, and piercing their hearts through with many sorrows? Such cases are too common. And painful as it is to contemplate them, they may be the cases of your own children, if parental faithfulness do not prevent. The good or evil consequences of what you now do, will be felt by succeeding generations. You will form the minds of your children to habits of virtue or vice. They will form the minds of their children; and these again will exert an influence on those that follow after; till the good or evil consequences of what you do, shall spread far and wide, and go down to the end of time. But they will not stop there. They will extend through eternity, filling heaven with songs of praise, or hell with the groans of despair.

4. You have reason to consider how you yourselves will be affected by the manner in which you train up your children. Parents sometimes live to witness the consequences of their mode of training their children, in a manner which affects them most sensibly. If they have been formed to virtuous habits, they will be a comfort to you. If they have been suffered to contract vicious habits, how often will they pierce your hearts with anguish. How delightful it must be to parents to witness their offspring growing up around them, cheerful and happy in themselves, and promoting the happiness of all with whom they have intercourse. And how often must your hearts be pained within you, if, when you look upon your children, you behold them wretched objects themselves, and marring the happiness of others. Parents also sometimes live to become old, and to need the aid of dutiful and affectionate children to support their declining years. How dreadful must be the disappointment, in that case, when they find their children so selfish and unfeeling as to treat them with neglect, and refuse a return of that care and kindness, which, when children, they experienced so largely at their parents' hands. If you regard your own comfort, then, you must not neglect your children. If you wish them to contribute to your

happiness, you must train them in such a manner that they will be capable of doing it, and may not be wanting in the disposition.

5. The times in which your children are to live, ought to be considered. They are perilous times; and they are likely to be more perilous. The general neglect of family government and family instruction is notorious. All who have the care of children, and wish to train them up in the way they should go, are compelled to feel how extremely difficult it is. They naturally look for the indulgences which are granted to others of their own age; and are not easily satisfied with a denial. And probably many parents, after a few struggles, give up their judgment to the wishes of their children, and leave them to take their own way. How common is it for them, at a very early age, to go where they please, and spend their leisure hours with companions of their own selection. And what parent knows the conversation that is had, and the practices that are indulged, the sentiments that are imbibed, and the habits that are begun, when his children are out of his sight? Facts sometimes transpire in relation to what passes at such times, which are enough to make every friend to the rising generation tremble for them; facts which go to show a corruption of sentiment and practice deeply rooted and widely spread, and most disastrous in its aspect. How often are habits of intemperance begun? How often are impure passions inflamed? How often is profane and indecent language listened to and repeated? How often are dishonest propensities acquired? How often are infidel sentiments imbibed, when parents are not suspecting any evil, nor using any means to guard the youthful mind? The widely spreading contempt of the Sabbath, the increasing prejudice against vital religion, the growing prevalence of corrupt sentiments, and the alarming increase of vicious practices, all show the peculiar dangers to which the young are exposed at the present day; and call loudly upon parents to awake from their false security, and make what efforts they can to save their children from the evils which threaten.

Do you ask, now, what can be done for the benefit of your children? It is impossible, within the limits of

these pages, to go far into particulars. But, a few things may be mentioned, of great and obvious importance.

1. You can cultivate their minds. One great reason why the young are so prone to low and grovelling pleasures, is, that their minds are so uncultivated. The taste for useful knowledge would exclude the taste for dissipation; and its gratification would be cheaper, as well as its consequences happier. If children were taught to think, and assisted to find materials for thought, they would find a pleasure in the exercise of their rational faculties, far exceeding the gross pleasures of animal indulgence. If they were taught to enjoy this pleasure, and were furnished with the means of obtaining it, by books of an interesting and useful character, and by sensible and rational conversation, home would be rendered attractive, and they would not feel the necessity of roving abroad in search of something to amuse them. If they were taught to think, and were trained to habits of reflection, they would not run into so many evils from mere thoughtlessness. If they were taught to value useful knowledge, they would not employ their time in the perusal of those works of fiction with which the world is flooded, and which are so dangerous in their tendency, from the erroneous views they give of real life, the corrupt sentiments they often contain, and the fascinating attractions with which they often surround vice and crime. An expensive education is not what is here intended. It is such an education as they can obtain at their own fireside. Let the parent begin early to cultivate their minds. Let him teach them to employ their own powers. Let him encourage the inquiries which they are disposed to make into the reason of things, and see that they learn to understand thoroughly whatever comes in their way. And abundant materials will be found within his reach, for such mental cultivation as is here intended.

2. You can establish your authority over your children, and keep them under suitable restraints. God has invested the head of a family with a certain degree of authority, and required him to exercise it. And you cannot refuse to exercise it, without refusing to do your duty. But it is not only the authority of God which requires this of you, the good of your children also requires

it. They are not capable of governing themselves. They are prone to desire a thousand gratifications which are injurious in their nature and tendency. And in these they must not be indulged. They also need to learn subordination to their superiors. God has placed others above them, as well as their parents. And to their superiors in age or station they must submit. It is greatly for their comfort when they have learned to do it, cheerfully, and from a sense of duty. They need also to learn submission to Divine Providence. To no other duty are they likely to be called so frequently as to this. And how can it be expected that they should submit cheerfully to the allotments of Providence, if they have never learned submission to their parents, nor submission to other superiors? Unhappy, indeed, is the case of that child, who has been brought up so tenderly, and with so much indulgence, as to have every wish gratified, while he remained in his father's house, and has never learned to give up his own will to the will of a superior, till he is cast forth into the wide world, to act for himself. How can he bear the daily contradictions he must now experience? How can he be otherwise than wretched, while his fellow men seem to conspire to counteract his wishes? And what else can be expected of him than that he should be perpetually murmuring at the allotments of Providence, so many of which are different from what he would choose for himself? If you would promote the best good of your children, you must govern them, and teach them a ready and cheerful submission to your authority. And you must exercise that authority in restraining them from every thing of an injurious nature. Your judgment is better than theirs; and you must exercise it, and require them to conform to it. Let your authority be exercised mildly, indeed, but let it be firm. Show them the reason for your decision, as far as may be, but insist upon their compliance. You must keep them from wicked and corrupting companions. It may be difficult, indeed, but it *must be done*. "A companion of fools shall be destroyed." You must keep them from wicked and corrupting practices. It is for this end, that you are invested with authority to command them, and they are required to obey. Think not you have

done your duty when you have given your advice. If that had been sufficient, the Bible would have stopped there, and not made it your duty to command, and their duty to obey. Eli gave his advice. He reproved, and expostulated. But this was not enough. And he was severely punished, because he neglected to do more. His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. For this he experienced the tokens of the divine displeasure. Your sons also will make themselves vile, if you do not restrain them. But if you begin the work in season, and establish your authority early, and keep them under salutary restraints from their childhood, and accustom them always to consult your wishes, and to regard them as law, their restraint from gross wickedness will be easy to you and pleasant to them. And they will form habits of submission, from their childhood, which will render it easy for them to give up their wishes when it shall be necessary, and to bring their feelings to the circumstances in which Divine Providence may place them.

3. You can teach them to make it an object to render themselves useful. The pleasure of doing good is far greater than any gratification which is merely personal. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Selfishness is dissocial in its nature, and not more wrong in itself than it is destructive of the happiness of its possessor. Where do you find happy children? Not in those families where they are trained to make self-gratification their great object. Not where they are so treated as to be led to think *self* the most important object in existence. Not where they are taught to think they are *good*, when they have excelled their fellows in some merely bodily or mental exertion. Not where they are taught to think the proper reward of goodness is some nice thing to please the taste, or some article of finery to feed their vanity. Not where they are taught that the great object is display, and the great end of exertion is to be admired and praised. You will find no happy children in such families. It is the direct way to make them wretched. Happy children are those who have learned to go out of themselves, and to find their enjoyment in promoting the enjoyment of those around them. Nothing is so sweet

as self-denial, for the good of others. And why should not your children be allowed to taste its sweetness, and be trained to its practice? Would you lay a solid foundation for comfort to your children in this life, you must train them to make themselves useful. You must teach them to value the acquirements they make in proportion to their utility, and to despise that which is merely adapted for *show*. You must teach them to feel respect for the useful occupations of life, and to value their time too highly to waste it on that which does no good. You must train them to find a pleasure in doing good; which, when they shall have learned, they will have a source of enjoyment which will not be affected by the ordinary fluctuations of property, nor destroyed by the common vicissitudes of life.

4. You can teach your children the truths and duties of the gospel. This duty is abundantly enjoined upon parents, in the word of God. And the best good of your children requires its faithful performance. If they are ever to be fitted for heaven, it must be "through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." They cannot be sanctified through that truth of which they are ignorant. They will not learn the truth, unless they are taught it. All admit the importance of their knowing and performing the duties of the gospel. But they will not know nor perform the duties of the gospel, unless they know and believe its doctrines. For the duties of the gospel are the practical result of its doctrines. Let no one seek to excuse himself from the discharge of this duty, by supposing that his children cannot understand these things. Children *can* understand them. Timothy had understood them from a child, having been taught them by his mother. The leading truths and duties of the gospel are the plainest things imaginable, and can be as well understood by children as by others, if they are only communicated in language which is intelligible.

Children can understand that the Bible is the word of God, though committed to writing by men, as well as they can understand that a letter received from an absent friend is *his* letter, though for some reason he may have chosen to dictate every word of it to another to write down from his lips. Children can understand

that God is a spirit, if they can understand that it is their own spirit which *thinks*, and not their body, which is only an instrument which the soul uses. And having thus obtained a correct idea of a spirit, by removing all bounds and limits, they can obtain a correct idea of the universal presence and boundless existence of their creator. They are conscious to themselves of having some knowledge, and of exerting some power; but they know that their knowledge and power are limited. Let them remove from their ideas of knowledge and power all limitations, and they can obtain correct ideas of the infinite knowledge and almighty power of God. It is not so easy for them to obtain correct ideas of the distinction of persons in the godhead, of a Trinity in unity; neither is it for those of mature years; because there is nothing like it in creatures, to which it can be compared. But they can see, that there is no contradiction in saying, that, God is in some respects *three*, and in other respects *one*. And if they can understand what is meant by the pronouns of the first, second, and third persons, *I*, *thou*, and *he*, they can understand that there must be something in the divine nature which renders it proper for these personal distinctions to be applied to the divine being, since they are so applied in the Bible; though it cannot be any such thing as would be inconsistent with the divine unity, since that is taught in the Bible also. And it is thought that this is all that any can understand or believe in relation to that doctrine. If children can understand the nature of moral goodness in man, they can also understand its nature in God, for its nature is the same. They can understand that an individual who is very kind to them, may be, nevertheless, a very bad man; and that, in order to constitute him a good man, he must do right because it is right, and not for the sake of what he shall gain or lose. And when they have thus obtained a correct idea of what constitutes a good moral character in a creature, they have only to remove all limits and all imperfections, and they can form a correct idea of the moral excellence of God. Children can be taught the difference between natural and moral good, and between natural and moral evil. And it is of great importance that they should be taught it, since there are many who

are seeking to confound them. They can see, that being actuated by motives of interest, is quite a different thing from being actuated by motives of duty; and that the sensations of shame and remorse which they feel when they are conscious of having done wrong, are very different from the regret they experience when they have only neglected to secure some advantage which lay before them. They can feel, and they do feel, their obligation to do right, even though they should suffer for it; and to avoid what is wrong, because it is wrong, though it should be ever so much to their advantage. If children can understand that the glory of a man consists in his goodness, and not in his knowledge or strength or riches or happiness, they can understand that the essential glory of God consists in his moral excellence, and not in his natural attributes, nor in the extent of his happiness. And if they can understand that a man has no more goodness than he exercises, they can understand that the highest glory of God consists in the most perfect exercise of all his moral perfections. And if they can understand that a single atom is unspeakably less than the material universe, which contains more atoms than numbers can express or thought conceive, then they can understand that all the good of which finite creatures are capable, bears no proportion to the glory of that being who is entirely without bounds. They can understand that the glory of God ought to be the object of supreme regard, both to himself and to creatures; because they can understand that every object ought to be regarded according to its importance. And they can see why God has chosen that there should be so great a variety of creatures, and such differences in their moral character, and in their final destiny, that there may be an opportunity for him, in the creation, preservation, government, and disposal of them, to exercise all his perfections to the best advantage. To exercise his mercy and grace, he must have some miserable and guilty creatures to save; and to exercise and display his love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity, he must have some good creatures to reward, and some wicked creatures to punish. And hence, too, children can understand why it was best that sin and misery should come into the world, and why it was best

that they should continue to exist forever; since mercy and grace could have no existence without being exercised towards miserable and guilty objects, and vindictive justice could have no exercise, but in the punishment of those who were guilty and deserving of endless misery. When they understand that the glory of God requires the most perfect exercise of all his perfections, they will readily understand why it is best that there should always be in existence proper objects towards which they can all be exercised. Children can understand the doctrine of the divine decrees; for there is nothing difficult to understand in the proposition, that God saw good reasons for choosing that every thing should take place just as it does. And if they can understand that it required nothing more than for God to choose that the world should exist, and it did exist, they can also understand that it never requires anything more than for God to choose that anything else should exist, and it does exist.

And they can understand the consistency between the decrees of God and the free agency of the creature, if they can understand that God had good reasons for choosing that creatures should freely do just what they do, in all cases. And as children know very well that praise or blame belong to a good or bad intention, they are well able to understand how God is worthy of praise for his good intention, and men are worthy of blame for their bad intention, in bringing about the same event. They can easily see that Joseph's brethren did wrong in selling him into Egypt, and that they were worthy of blame in so doing; and that, though, contrary to their intention, what they did was the means of accomplishing good; yet they were not the less to blame, and had none the less occasion to be ashamed and to humble themselves for their wicked intention. And by these and similar cases, they can understand that all the sin that is ever committed is wrong in itself, and worthy of blame, and deserving of punishment, though God means it unto good. And as they can easily understand how Joseph's brethren were under obligation to condemn themselves for the wrong they had done, because it was wrong, and to loathe and abhor themselves for it; and yet to love and praise God for his good design in it, as the best way to accom-

plish the important object he had in view ; so they can easily understand how *they* ought to feel in view of their own sins, and how all ought to feel. And thus the duty of repentance for sin, will appear entirely consistent with the duty of rejoicing in the Lord always, and praising him for every event which he brings to pass.

Children can understand the doctrine of total depravity. For they can easily see that selfishness is wrong ; and there is no great difficulty in their being made to understand that the gratification of their selfish feelings, or their own happiness, in some form, has always been their ultimate object in all that they have done. And when they understand the doctrine of total depravity, there is no difficulty in making them understand the nature and necessity of regeneration. If they have always done wrong, and nothing but wrong, it is necessary that they should begin to do right. And as they have always acted from motives of interest, and never sought any higher object than their own happiness, it is necessary that they should begin to act from motives of duty, and seek the glory of God as their chief end. And as their old heart has consisted in a wrong choice, they can understand that the new heart must consist in a right choice. And as they have always been conscious of making their own choice in doing wrong, so they can understand that they must make their own choice in doing right. And if they have understood that they have always been dependent upon God, though active, in doing wrong, they can understand that they are both dependent and active in doing right ; and that, while God puts his Spirit within them, and causes them to walk in his statutes, it is *they* that walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments and do them. Children can understand the nature and necessity of the atonement. A child can see, that if he is guilty of a flagrant transgression against the commands of his parent, and is suffered to go unpunished, his parent is dishonored, and his authority and government sink into contempt ; and that unless something can be done to prevent these evil consequences, there can be no place for pardon. But if some way can be found out to prevent these evil consequences, other than by the infiction of the merited punishment, some way that shall

do equal honor to the law, and as effectually support the government of his parent as punishment would do, then a pardon might be granted. God has found out such a way. By giving his Son to die, the just for the unjust, that has been done, which honors the divine law and supports the divine government, as effectually as it could be, by the death of the sinner. And when they understand the nature of the atonement, there will be no difficulty in understanding how it is equally sufficient in itself for all men, as it is for one man; and how it lays a foundation for the offer of pardon to be made to all without distinction. Children can understand also the nature of *pardon*; for when they receive a pardon from their parents, they know it is only an exemption from the punishment which they still deserve. They feel guilty, though they are forgiven; and never imagine that their parents view them as innocent, any more after they have forgiven them than they did before. Children can also understand the terms on which pardon is offered to sinners in the gospel. They can easily see, that it would be inconsistent to grant them a pardon, until they repent and turn from their sins, until they condemn themselves for having done wrong, and cordially justify God in his sentence of condemnation. And they can see, that since pardon is granted for Christ's sake, it is necessary and proper that they should cordially approve of that way of saving sinners, and fall in with the gospel plan, which exercise of mind constitutes that faith in Christ which is the appropriate condition of pardon.

Children can understand the doctrine of election, and the doctrine of reprobation. They can easily see, that, since all with one consent reject the mercy offered in the gospel, it would be right if God should leave all to perish. And that, if he chooses to save a part, and makes them willing in the day of his power, he has a right to select whom he pleases and make them willing, while he treats the rest according to the choice they have made for themselves when they prayed to be excused from any participation in the gospel feast.

Children can understand the doctrine of the saints' perseverance. They can see that none but those who actually possess the temper of Christ can have any evi-

* Is God a respecter of persons?
Should we have all men to be saved?
Should we have all men to be saved?

have secured a thick, at least, of us in our
and all is right and for the best
 dence that they are his disciples, and are interested in his salvation; and consequently, that perseverance in holy obedience is essential to Christian character. And they can see that where God has begun a work of sanctification in any, he can as easily carry it on, if he chooses, as he could begin it. And since he has taught us that he does, it follows, that where this work does not appear, there is no evidence of his having begun it; but we must conclude, that, however fair appearances may have been, they have been all delusive and vain, and the subjects of them no better than the stony ground hearers. Children can understand the doctrine of a future judgment. They know what is meant by being called to account before their parents for any wrong they have done here. And they can have no difficulty in understanding, that, at the end of the world, God will call every one to a strict account for all the deeds done in the body, when every thought, and every word, and every action of their lives, will be made known before the assembled universe; when those who have embraced the gospel, and turned from their sins by repentance, shall receive the forgiveness of their sins, and be rewarded with the tokens of divine approbation for all the acts of obedience they have performed, and the wicked shall be doomed to suffer the tokens of God's disapprobation forever.

Children can also be made to understand the duties taught in the gospel. As these are nothing but the practical result of the doctrines taught in the gospel, when they understand the doctrines, it will be easy to understand the duties which grow out of them. They are indeed prone to misunderstand them, through the influence of a selfish heart. They are naturally selfish, and if particular pains is not taken to prevent it, they will give every thing a selfish construction. They will think the reason why they should be good, is, because it will tend to promote happiness. And if they are allowed to embrace this fundamental error, it will lead to erroneous views of every doctrine which the Bible teaches, and of every duty which the Bible enjoins. They should be taught that they ought to be good because it is right. And when they have once obtained a clear idea of the

Q. Does he choose to drop it?

distinction between natural and moral good, and between natural and moral evil, when they clearly perceive that holiness is good in its own nature, independently of its tendency, and that sin is evil in its own nature, independently of its tendency, there will be no difficulty in making them see that they are under moral obligation to do right, let consequences be what they may, and that they are under moral obligation to avoid sin because it is wrong. They will be well able to understand that *moral obligation* is not the same thing as a calculation of advantage and disadvantage. They will see that they ought to love God for the moral excellence of his character, and not merely for what they hope to gain by it. They will see that they ought to love his justice in punishing sin, as really as his mercy and grace in pardoning it; and that they would be under moral obligation to love that justice, if it should be exercised in punishing *them*, as well as when it is exercised in punishing others. Children can understand the duty of unconditional submission to God. They easily see, that, when they have been disobedient to their parents, they ought to submit to their parents' will, and cheerfully acquiesce in any punishment which God has directed parents to inflict. And that, if they should withhold their submission till they can receive a promise from the parent that they shall not be punished at all, there would be no submission in the case. Children can understand the duty of repentance for sin, and can easily distinguish between true repentance, and all its counterfeits. For they easily see the wide difference there is, between being sorry for what they have done in disobeying their parents, in view of the consequences, and being sorry for having done wrong because it is wrong. Children can understand the duty of prayer, and know what is meant by praying in faith. For when dutiful and affectionate children go to a wise and good parent to ask anything, they do it with more confidence in his judgment than in their own; and having presented their request, they are ready to leave the matter to his decision, with entire confidence in his superior wisdom, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done." And if they have such faith as this, in the wisdom and goodness of an earthly parent, they can

easily see that they ought to have still stronger faith in the superior wisdom and goodness of their heavenly Father. Children can understand the duty of obeying all God's commandments from the *heart*, because it is right, and from a sense of duty; and that every appearance of obedience which is prompted by selfish motives is no obedience at all, but must be regarded as positive transgression.

5. You can guard your children against the seductive influence of error. As we learn from the Scriptures that truth is the means of salvation, so we learn from them that error is the means of destruction. They tell us, that "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." It is not sufficient to teach them the truth merely; they must be warned against error, and have its destructive consequences pointed out to them. You must call their attention to the manner in which the Bible speaks of error, and let them understand that it will be at the peril of their souls, if they fall into it. And lest they should not suspect any danger, where there is really the greatest, you must let them see that the advocates of error are represented in the Scriptures as exceedingly artful; and that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light. Let them understand that the native temper of the human heart is favorable to error, and predisposes them to embrace it. Let them understand that many who profess to believe the truth, speak lightly of its usefulness, and thus exert the most dangerous influence against it. Let them understand that some profess to embrace the truth, but actually teach error; and that others who teach some truth, promote error by keeping back a part of the truth. Let them know that the advocates of error often use the same terms by which others express the truth, but use them in a different sense, and so deceive many. Let them understand that it is not against the most gross errors alone that they need to be on their guard, but against the smallest; because many who strenuously oppose the grosser errors, are really promoting them by openly inculcating, or silently countenancing those which lead to them. Let them understand that the most dangerous species of false religion, is that

which bears the greatest resemblance to the true; and that it is the most dangerous for this reason, that it is so much more likely to be mistaken for the true. You are forewarned in the Scriptures that the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine, when they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables, when the way of truth shall be evil spoken of, when evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived, and when they shall privily bring in damnable heresies, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. If you would not have your children led away with the error of the wicked, and by becoming partakers in their sins, become also partakers in their plagues, you must faithfully guard them against the seductive influence of error, and train them up to the belief, and love, and practice, of the truth.

6. You can enforce your instructions by a good example. All else that you can do will be of little avail without this. It is the force of example that governs the world. And, of all persons, children feel the force of example most. How difficult is it for them to resist the current of evil example, even when they know it is carrying them to destruction. And how certain will be the failure of all your efforts to instruct them, if you do not enforce your instructions by your own example. If you wish them to feel the importance of cultivating their minds by useful reading and sensible conversation, you must let them see that you have a high value for useful knowledge, and prize the improvement of the mind more than the possession of wealth. If you wish to teach them submission to your authority, and a ready acquiescence in the restraints you think proper to impose, you must let them see that you govern yourselves, and cheerfully submit to the allotments of Providence; and that you restrain yourselves from those indulgences which are injurious and improper. If you wish to train them to habits of benevolence and usefulness, you must let them see that you are not selfish in your enjoyments, but take the greatest pleasure in doing good. If you wish to teach your children the doctrines and duties of the gospel, you must show them that you delight greatly in the law of the Lord, and walk in all his commandments blameless. If

you wish to guard them against the seductions of error, you must let them see that you regard it with fear and with abhorrence, and that you dare not express a favorable opinion of that which the Bible condemns. Whatever you wish your children to be, you must yourselves be, that they may see before their eyes, an example which it is safe to copy.

7. You can pray with and for your children. There is great propriety in this, and great encouragement for it too, when you are doing the other things that have been mentioned. But, if you neglect to do for them what has been pointed out, it is scarcely to be expected that you will pray for them as you ought. The inconsistency is too glaring. And if you neglect the means of training up your children in the way they should go, you will probably neglect to pray for them also. For, how can you pray to God to give success to means which you do not use? or how can you expect he will hear prayer in their behalf, when you neglect to use with them the means of his appointment?

Consider, then, the influence you are capable of exerting upon the minds of your children; consider the fearful responsibility which lies upon you, in relation to them; consider the dangers to which they are exposed, and the solemn account you must soon render for the manner in which you have trained them; and the affecting meeting you must have with them in the day of final decision; and whatsoever your hands find to do, do it with your might; that when the Judge of all shall appear, you may be able to say, Lord, here we are, and the children thou hast given us.

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